

WITNESS TREE: LANDSCAPE AND DISSENT IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY
UNITED STATES.

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

by
Daegan Ryan Miller
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WITNESS TREE: LANDSCAPE AND DISSENT IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY
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Daegan Ryan Miller, Ph.D.

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“Witness Tree: Landscape and Dissent in the Nineteenth-Century United States” is a cultural and environmental history that draws on a range of primary source materials, both textual and visual, to trace how nineteenth-century Americans unsure about the costs of Progress reimagined and actively reshaped their landscapes. I do this by following one green thread in particular: the ways that Americans incorporated trees into their cultural productions. In a country popularly known in the nineteenth century as Nature’s Nation, trees have historically borne a rich mantle of cultural allusion. For instance, land surveyors—often figured as the advanced guard of modern capitalism—used trees to denote the bounds of property and empire, which they called “witness trees.” This dissertation begins by stepping back from the material world of the surveyor for a moment, and asking of his trees, what was it they witnessed: a crime, or divine revelation? Were they helpless observers, or active participants in what unfolded before their knotty eyes? If trees are witnesses, can they speak? Can what they say be heard?

As it turns out, nineteenth-century Americans from quite different backgrounds—radical land surveyors, abolitionists, utopian socialists, anarchists, landscape photographers, wilderness tourists, artists, and popular writers—were asking similar questions; what’s more, they consistently created varied landscapes highlighting the unnaturalness of capitalism, industrialization, scientific racism, and Manifest Destiny. “Witness Tree” is the story of these widely dispersed yet culturally cohesive dissidents, a story emphasizing a lost legacy of environmental humility, spatial sensitivity, and radical social justice.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Daegan Ryan Miller is a cultural and environmental historian of the nineteenth-century United States. He received his B.A. in history and film studies from Middlebury College, and his M.A. and Ph.D from Cornell University. Teaching history and environmental issues to high school students from 2002-2006 was a watershed period in his life: it was during these formative years that the very first root—botanists call it the radicle—emerged from the germinating seed of what was to become “Witness Tree.”

For Today

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I grew up in the woods and farm fields of rural upstate New York, and though it is hard for me to pinpoint the exact birthplace of this dissertation, it is easy enough to find the muddy boot-prints of my upbringing on the following pages. There has been no force more foundational in my life than the example set and the atmosphere created by my family. When I was young, we didn't always have much money, but we always had books, and music, and art, and lively discussions, and always lots of love: for all of this I truly thank my Mom, Maggie, and my Dad, Eric. My little sister, Carrie-Elise is the hardest worker that I have ever known; she has shown me by her example what it means to be tenacious, to see a job through until it is done.

Had I not taken a job as a history and environmental issues and ethics teacher at the Chewonki Foundation's Maine Coast Semester (it was the only high school at which I could even get an interview), there would never have been a dissertation to write. At least, not this one. There, at the end of a dirt road on a small spit of land whose five-toed forested peninsula slapped out into Montsweag Bay, I first discovered folks who were willing to humbly live out their environmental and social convictions, who argued through the practices of their everyday lives that a better world can be had simply by choosing to live more deliberately. Scott Andrews and Sue West have exemplified this lifelong commitment for me, and I heartily thank them both for taking me under their broad wings. Bill Hinkley, his wife Amy, their tow-headed kids, Max, Ezra, and Amos, the family's blueberry fields, and Bill's parting gift to me as I left Wiscasset for Ithaca of Scott Nearing's *The Good Life* continues to shape how I think about raising my own curly-headed little boy. Jesse Dukes has become a life-long friend, travel companion, and intellectual sparring partner. We don't often agree, and I'm always better off for our mental fisticuffs. I'll also be forever grateful that I got to share my love of country music and surf rock

with Jesse; someday, we'll play in a band together. But it is really my co-teacher, confidant, and *agent provocateur* Paul Arthur who, more than any other single person I know, has shown me why a life of the mind is worth working, and at times fighting, so hard for. Paul is one of those rare people who takes a pure and simple joy in that most human, humane, of acts: thinking. He's the first Ph.D. with whom I became really good friends, and with his boundless intellectual excitement convinced me that academia was a community to which I wanted to belong—as long as I could find in it others like him. And he let me ride his motorcycle.

As it has turned out, Cornell has proved to be a wonderfully sustaining community of folks, and my debts run deep. In 2008 Ed Baptist and Jon Parmenter put together a weekly colloquium of grad-student works-in-progress, and it has been the single most intellectually stimulating departmentally organized aspect of my time in graduate school. I've also been very fortunate to be a member of a number of grad-student reading groups: the American Reading Group, the Nature and Modernity Working Group, American Studies Before 1900, the Cornell Roundtable on Environmental Studies Topics, and the dissertation writing group, *Through the Disciplinary Looking Glass: Imagining the Present, Imagining the Past*. All of these have been incredibly important to me, and I want to thank all of the fellow travelers who have participated in them, especially Daniel Ahlquist, Tom Balcerski, Angie Boyce, Dianne Cappiello, Duane Corpus, Mari Crabtree (one of the most talented chefs I've ever met, and whose culinary talent is exceeded only by her deeply caring, deeply thoughtful approach to the past) Ray Craib, Brian Cuddy, Elisa DaVià, Ryan Edwards, Sarah Ensor (who defines a gently rigorous intellect), Brigitte Fielder, Melissa Gniadek, Will Harris, Toni Jaudon, Maeve Kane, Candace Katungi, Amy Kohout, Peter Lavelle, Laura Martin (a poet, scientist, and historian whose brilliance I have had the great good luck to bask in) Max McComb, Vernon Mitchell, Brent Morris, Trais

Pearson, David Rojas, Melissa Rosario, Aaron Sachs, Djahane Salehabadi, John Senchyne, Mike Schmidli, and Rebecca Tally.

There's one group, though, that deserves special mention: Historians Are Writers!. Heather Furnas, Rebecca Macmillan, Katie Proctor, Aaron Sachs, and I all settled down to the first meeting of HAW! back in 2007 with our copies of Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow: A History, A Story, and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier*—a book which, six years later, is still probably the most important thing I've read during my time in grad school. The group was founded on the principle that literature and academic writing should not be antithetical propositions: to the contrary, the best history has always also been, and must continue to be literary (hence the exclamation point). HAW! has grown into a vibrant community over the past six years, and despite my congenital—indeed, genetic—suspicion of any gathering composed of more than one person, the HAW! folks have nurtured me with their critical insight, good nature, beer, and deep faith in the project of exploring our world through the craft of writing. HAW! is what academia at its very most utopian can be. Besides those four others with whom I read *Wolf Willow*, I'd especially like to thank Sarah Ensor, Matts Fibiger, Joe Giacomelli, Melissa Gniadek, Amy Kohout (I can't think of better hands in which to leave HAW!) Laura Martin, Tina Post, Jackie Reynoso, Rob Vanderlan, Ben Wang, and Josi Ward.

There are a few folks who deserve special mention on their own, the sorts of people whom I left Maine hoping to find. Foremost among these is Amy Kohout—office mate, colleague, friend, incredible chef—about whom I could write paragraphs. She's the sort of person who knits you a lap blanket for your wedding and a chemo cap for when you fall ill. Many of the arguments in what follows were worked out with Amy, and though I'll never chat with her over a “smart”phone or tweet at her on Twitter, I look forward to chewing on knotty

ideas in her company—preferably over caesar salad and grilled pizza—for the rest of my life. For all the snarky caricatures of the Ivory Tower, it’s the only place where one could meet someone like Franz Hofer. Introduced to each other by a shared interest in punk rock, we soon bonded by sampling some of the world’s finest beers, and later forged intellectual bonds discussing photography and visual culture—I’ll long remember our discussion of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. I’m saving a 2010 Boon geuze for the next time we meet. Brent Morris is truly unique, and some of my most treasured grad-school memories—watching cars slide down a snowy William Street from the Chapter House, mountain biking in Shindagin Hollow, listening to stories of Brent driving in the same ice storm from Arizona to Ithaca in a jalopy of a VW van with neither heat nor working windshield wipers—feature Brent. He’s also a phenomenal historian whose deep knowledge of abolitionism astounds me. Mike Schmidli is a whirling dervish of intellectual excitement—thoughtful and creative, and one of the most efficient, most dedicated writers I’ve ever met. Katie Proctor was my first grad-school friend, and she indelibly molded those early years with her critical thought, careful prodding, and warm support. She also wrote me the single greatest, fist-in-the-air-pumping, life affirming e-mail that I have ever received: “We’ve got work to do,” indeed. Charis Boke has refused to let me indulge in my misanthropic tendency to huddle alone in my darkened office, the only light coming from an artificially glowing computer screen. We’ve instead met in dimly lit, Dostoyevskian tea houses, there to read radical literature and plot—this is exactly what I always imagined to be the work of intellectuals, and I’m only sorry that it took us six years to co-conspire. Finally, Ben Wang gave me a hand when I really needed one. I’m not sure how many miles we’ve run together, but there’s something about my years in Ithaca that I’ll always associate with long, early morning runs on freezing cold Saturdays in February and March. 1:22:36, Ben, 1:22:26!

A tremendous thanks also to Dr. Sami Husseini, Dr. Charles Garbo, and especially the nurses at the Cayuga Cancer Center.

To turn to more utilitarian matters, I've had the good fortune to be the recipient of a number of fellowships and awards. Without two Sage Fellowships from Cornell University; two Research Grants from Cornell's American Studies Program; a summer-time Walter LaFeber Fellowship from Cornell—which allowed me to find A.J. Russell; a Dissertation Proposal Development Fellowship, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and administered by the Social Science Research Council (one of the most intellectually stimulating gatherings I've ever had the good luck to be a part of; thanks especially to Sumathi Ramaswamy and Martin Jay, the brilliant Christine DeLucia, and the deeply caring Tom Okie); a Boldt Fellowship from Cornell; a wonderful month spent at the American Antiquarian Society/Center for Historic American Visual Culture courtesy of a Jay and Deborah Last Fellowship; a Sustainability Grant from Cornell's Society for Humanities Initiative for Sustainability via the Humanities and Arts; and the Hampel Award from Cornell—without all of this financial and intellectual support, “Witness Tree” would never have germinated.

Nice as all of the funding has been, without the mutual aid of archivists and research staff throughout the country, this dissertation would never have gotten off the ground. I'd like to thank the folks at the Concord Free Public Library; the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photography at the New York Public Library; The Huntington Library; The American Antiquarian Society and the Center for Historic American Visual Culture; The Morgan Library and Museum; Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; The Adirondack Museum; the Bell Memorial Library; Cornell's Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections; and the Special Collections Research Center at Syracuse University. I'd especially like to thank Leslie

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Little did I know when I left Maine that I'd find four mentors who would spend the better part of the next decade supportively and continuously training, pruning, trimming, and ultimately encouraging my intellectual growth to take on its own unique form. One's graduate school advisors have no choice but to be formative figures—for good or ill—and I can honestly say that I can't imagine thinking without the example and careful cultivation of Andrea Hammer, Ron Kline, Ray Craib, and Aaron Sachs. They know my intellectual ways better than any one else alive. It's hard to remember a time when I didn't look out at the landscape through eyes made more perceptive by Andrea Hammer (one of the best graduate instructors I've ever had the pleasure of being schooled by) and the intellectually voracious Ray Craib, who first introduced me to Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*. The individual guided reading sessions in which I spent a few hours every week delving deeply into the history of science and technology with Ron Kline were the academic equivalents of expeditions into terra incognita: thrilling, filled with (my) uncertainty, brimming with new discoveries around every corner—indeed, it was the rare meeting when Ron couldn't turn one of my ideas into a potential dissertation (is this partly why “Witness Tree” is four-dissertations-in-one?). And Aaron Sachs...well, it's hard to overstate the influence Aaron has had on nearly every aspect of my time in Ithaca, from dissertation birthing to child rearing. From the very first days when he treated me as an intellectual equal—

despite abundant evidence of my own bumbling unsophistication—to the last sentence he penned to me in his six-page (!), single-spaced commentary on my dissertation, Aaron has exemplified the care, the commitment, and the stubborn independence that has always attracted me to a life of the mind.

Finally, my beautiful, brilliant, strong Talia, who has lived this life with me since we first met amidst the spruces and tides of Midcoast Maine: this life that we've built together—the sunshine daydream—is really all that I've ever wanted. We welcomed our perfect little boy, Wyeth Gabriel, into the world in 2011, and without you both none of what follows—not a damn word—would mean a thing.

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I watched the trees slowly recede, waving their despairing arms, seeming to say to me: "What you fail to learn from us to-day, you will never know. If you allow us to drop back into the hollow of this road from which we sought to raise ourselves up to you, a whole part of yourself which we were bringing to you will vanish forever into thin air."

-Marcel Proust, *Within A Budding Grove*, 1919.

FORWARD

When the Bough Breaks

*Then the coal company came with the world's largest shovel,
And they tortured the timber, and stripped all the land.
Well, they dug for their coal till the land was forsaken,
And they wrote it all down as the progress of man.*

-John Prine, "Paradise," 1971.¹

What happens when the oldest living witness to the past comes crashing down?

Where are you, who are you when the major landmark, the narrative key to the stories, both triumphal and tragic, rooted in one particular, lived landscape vanishes?

A new day will dawn, sure, but on what?

How do you orient yourself in this new wilderness of impoverished meaning, and how can you be sure that your compass points true?

Bostonians awoke on a bleak Wednesday morning in February of 1876—the Centennial year—to an entirely different city. At 7pm the night before, The Great Elm on the Common had been toppled by a hard wind.² February is a tough month in New England: teases of spring thaws are slapped away by biting gusts and plunging temperatures, and on the coast, offshore and onshore gales compete to see which can blow most furiously. Everything—the ground, the air, even the sunlight—has the flavor and feel of dampness, no matter the chill. If dark and stormy nights make for poor prologues, they're fatal for aged trees, and the night of the 15th was no exception: the Great Elm, rotting from the inside out and too tall, too shapely for its own good, finally succumbed to the storm. With it went a whole archive of historical memory. It was as if a great library had gone up in smoke. The loss was keenly felt.

Until that crashing moment, the Great Elm crops up in Boston's cultural history wherever one cares to look. On the earliest surviving map of the town, John Bonner's 1722 *The Town of Boston*, it stands there on the Common, in the prime of its life, conspicuously bigger than its neighbors, the powder and watch houses, more stately, indeed, than any other landmark. Bonner's map is all roads and ships, all motion, transience, a pictorial representation of modern mobility, the circulation of merchant capital.

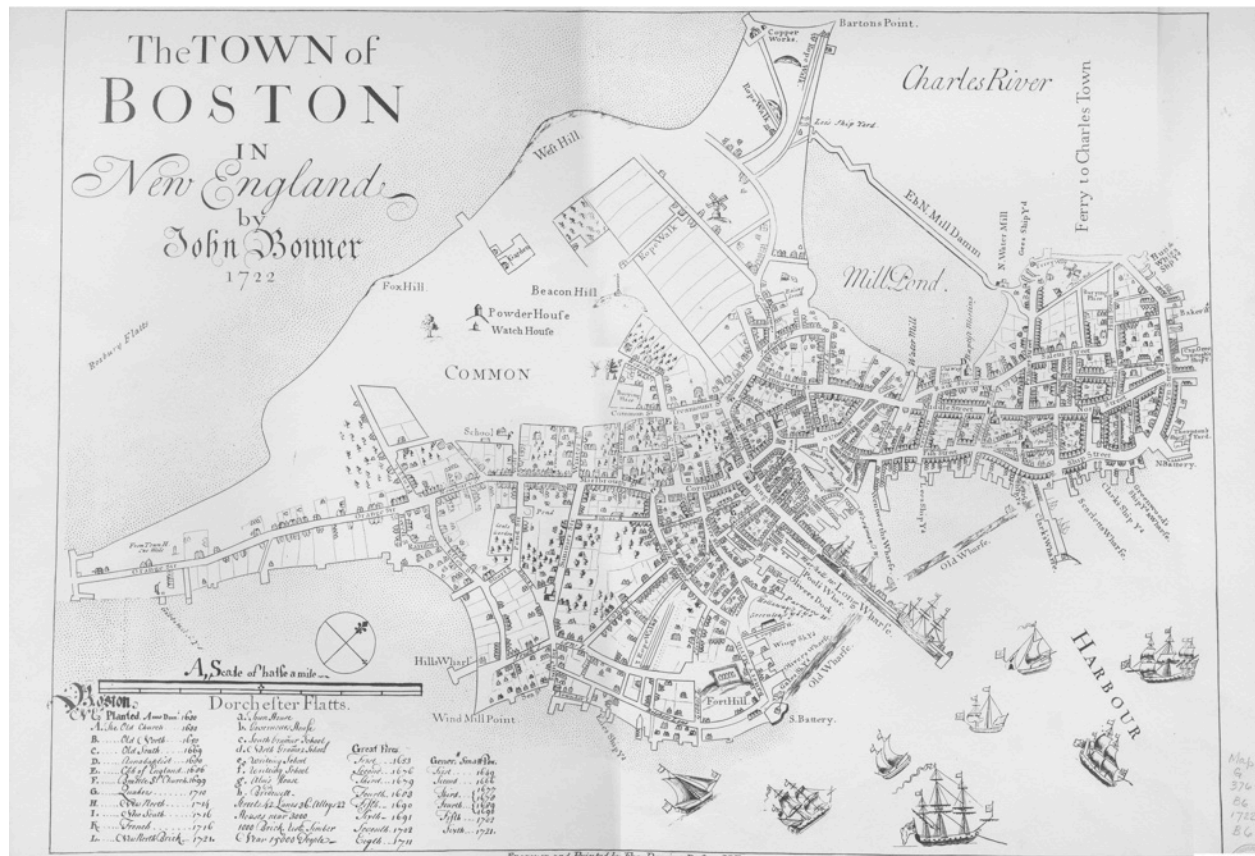


Figure 1: John Bonner, *The Town of Boston*, 1722. Courtesy Olin Library, Cornell University.³

But as is so often the case in modern America, the celebration of fluidity is tempered by anxiety: if everything is always in motion, chaotic, if there are no solid foundations, then how can we ever know that we know anything?⁴ By the nineteenth century, the engines of capital in the West were increasingly revving hotter and faster, and along with this came all sorts of cultural expression, including a growing sense of disconnection. It's no accident that Bonner's map was reprinted, almost obsessively, throughout the nineteenth-century: it was a powerful totem of nativity—a town as natural as a tree—and a way for Bostonians to stake a claim, to reassure themselves that they belonged. Bonner's map bespeaks a desire for rootedness in the face of chaos, one provided by the Elm, a stronger, bigger, longer-lived guarantor of human presence than the puny powder or watch houses. Indeed, Boston itself seems to have grafted itself upon

the tree. The city wasn't *founded* in 1630, according to Bonner, but *planted*, and we can read his map as fiction, as magical realism: the Great Elm, an amalgamation collapsing past, present, and future, blurring boundaries between the natural and the built.

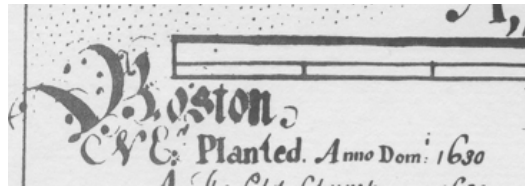


Figure 2: Detail, Bonner, *The Town Of Boston*. Courtesy Cornell University.

This fantastic Elm wasn't content to remain the mere rootstock of a city: it wanted its scions to succeed in all aspects of cultural and intellectual life. One history of Methodism in the U.S. had it that the cathedral-like Elm sheltered Jesse Lee, the minister who first brought the denomination to New England. And though "scarcely a line of the preacher's words can be found, and no record of his text has been kept," the Elm testified to the promise of Methodism, and even stood witness to a miracle: "the day that Jesse Lee first preached under this Old Elm...a Methodist child was born."⁵ It was the subject of painting competitions, its figure measured and reassuringly found "beautiful and finely proportioned"; its history was guessed at—some thought it predated European settlement and had long dreamed of the city that would surround it, while still others thought it had been planted by a Captain Henchman in 1670, "an officer who had distinguished himself in the Indian Wars"—and countless leaves of paper were inscribed with Elm-inspired poetry. *To the Old Elm Tree in the Centre of Boston Common* was the title of an early one from 1826, a poetic meditation on a long-gone childhood, death, and the hope for a joy-filled future nurtured by the Elm's shade.⁶ Sometimes, the Elm itself broke out in verse, as in the *Appeal of the Old Elm on Boston Common*, from 1860:

Ye gaze upon my knotted trunk,
Upon each gnarled bough,

And cry—"Though centuries have passed,
Behold its vigor now!
Thrilled by the touch of youthful Spring,
Its vital currents rise
And burst in myriad emerald drops
Against our April Skies.

O, dear old tree, we love thee well—
Link with the long gone past!
No ax thy sturdy form shall fell;
Still they broad shadow cast;
And we will come from sire to son
To linger in thy shade,
And ponder o'er the wondrous scenes
Our Old Elm has surveyed."

The poem is a long one, nineteen eight-line stanzas, which gives its author plenty of space to layer narrative textures upon each other, to intermingle different voices, to blur identities and make them appear naturally native: the author's, the Elm's, Boston's denizens. Yet, despite the tightly crafted performance, dis-ease lames the lines, can be heard in a bit too much protesting that, yes, of course, Our Old Elm really is a centuries-old link between a long-gone U.S. past and future, can be felt in the chronological limp that stumbles over its own too-careful avoidance of the American Indian presence—the "passing tide"—that could not ever be quite erased from the landscape.⁷

Yes, I have watched your city's growth
In wisdom, beauty, wealth;
Have marked, with joy, her careful heed
Of comfort and health;
Seen her firm foothold plant itself
Upon the passing tide
Sustaining palace halls of Homes
And traffic, side by side.

Have seen her lay her warm breast bare
The wondrous web to weave
By which her lowliest child may share
The good her great receive—
Night blossoming with rays of hope

For every pathway dim,
Day gushing with the living streams
That strengthen heart and limb.⁸

For many Americans, 1860 was an anxious year, an election year, a year spent listening to stump speeches, worrying about the future of the Union, and wondering whether or not a victory by the Rail Splitter would enrage the South to the point of dissolution. With both the past and the future insecure, it was a tree—not modern science, modern technology, or modern economics—that secured Bostonians in a place, in a time.

The Great Elm wasn't alone: trees as stationary witnesses, reminders of the past, bulwarks against the rapidly changing process of modernity, have rooted the cultural imagination of Americans from wildly different backgrounds.⁹ Especially in the U.S., a country popularly known as "Nature's Nation," a nation originally covered by seemingly unbroken woods, trees bore rich cultural fruit. Many Americans maintained a sort of sylvan literacy, a second tongue that has been largely rendered unintelligible by the gradual movement toward urbanization, toward the use of fossil fuels for heat, toward the standardization, commodification, and simplification of our diet.¹⁰ A.J. Downing, the famed landscape architect who originally conceived of a great public park in New York City, wrote of one particularly well-loved fruit: "the allegorical tree of knowledge bore apples, and the celebrated golden fruit of the Hesperus, guarded by a sleepless dragon which it was one of the triumphs of Hercules to slay, were also apples.... In some parts of England, the antique custom of saluting the apple trees in the orchards, in the hope of obtaining a good crop the next year, still lingers among the farmers."¹¹ This wasn't erudite research, appealing to only a few experts in the field, but the sort of deep cultural context whose reverberations would have been widely felt: apples were the fruits of Western culture, every bit as treasured as the *Odyssey*.

An 1854 nursery catalog from Newburgh, New York, Downing's birthplace, lists 356 varieties of apple trees for sale, and one could spend hours paging through descriptions of the Red Doctor, Cathead, Mother, or Victual and Drink, trying to choose between apples that were good for baking or drying, eating fresh-from-the tree, or turning into cider. Some apples ripened early, some late, some were small and wild tasting, some were huge and mellow, and if you wanted to eat apples year round, you needed to know which varieties could get you through the winter and spring. If apples didn't suit your palate, you could flip a few pages and instead spend your time trying to choose from among 510 varieties of pear, some, like the Frederika Bremmer, described alluringly, and perhaps ironically, as "melting, buttery."¹²

Downing wasn't a specialist hidden from the public eye: before Frederick Law Olmsted, who did design Central Park, he was the nineteenth century's most well known booster of landscaping and beautification. His journal, the *Horticulturalist*, was widely read, and his textbooks, like *The Fruits and Fruit Trees of America* (1847), were huge tomes filled with beautifully, painstakingly crafted chromolithographs devoted to one thing only: taste. After an afternoon spent deliciously lost among *The Fruits and Fruit Trees of America*, I have come away with the lingering sense that for nineteenth-century Americans, biting into an apple was the prelude to enchantment as the flavors combined into a multi-hued tapestry of synesthetic cultural allusion.

The nineteenth-century U.S. was still largely a wooden society: wood served many of the purposes for which we today use plastics or other oil-based stuff. People ate their fruit out of wooden bowls, fetched their water with wooden buckets, cooked their food over a wooden fire or threw a few logs in the stove to keep warm, retrieved their stored apples from wooden barrels, walked on wooden boardwalks in shoes held together with wooden pegs whose leather was

tanned with hemlock bark, and rode in wooden carriages whose wooden wheels rolled over wooden plank roads. Wood was such a necessary part of daily life that in the late nineteenth century fears of a timber famine prompted a survey of the nation's woodlands. Wood spiced the daily tastes, feels, and smells of nineteenth-century life. While out on one of his saunters, Henry David Thoreau bumped into his neighbor, Joe Hosmer—a man who knew his trees, and who was splitting kindling as the Transcendentalist, who wanted to talk trees and lichens, stopped for a visit. But instead of natural history, Thoreau got something else. Hosmer was absorbed in his task, and told Thoreau that freshly cut red oak “smells like urine three or four days old.” “There are two kinds of white oak,” the farmer continued. “When I’ve been chopping, say along in March, after the sap begins to start, I’ll sometimes come to an oak that will color my axe steel-blue...well, that oak is fine-grained and heavier than the common.... Then there are two kinds of black oak.... One is the mean oak, or bastard.”¹³ What may seem like quaintly rusticated knowledge was in fact commonplace and crucial throughout the nineteenth century: it's wisdom acquired through everyday practice. The observation that certain species are fine grained and thus split easily, or not—I'm guessing that many a maul handle was broken and many a curse word lavished upon the bastard oak—or that some have a peculiar odor, the many hundreds of daily, quotidian interactions with wood, formed a rich humus of cultural knowledge.¹⁴

And so it makes sense that a native sylvan literacy worked its way into the cultural imagination's grain. “In America, the ‘favourite elm,’ and several other native trees, are inseparably connected with the history of the country,” wrote one observer in 1846. “They forcibly appeal to the imaginations of the people.... They teach lessons of wisdom to aged and hoary-headed men—bespeak their country's wrongs—their country's glory, and tell them much concerning the mutability of things below.”¹⁵ They didn't only stand for the nation, either: elms

were also traditionally planted to celebrate weddings, a recently built house, a birth, or as tokens of friendship.¹⁶ They signified the momentous, happy occasions in life, as well as domestication. “Many larger trees, especially elms, about a house are a surer indication of family distinction and worth than any evidence of wealth,” wrote Thoreau in 1851. “Any evidence of care bestowed on these trees secures the traveller’s respect as for a nobler husbandry than the raising of corn and potatoes.”¹⁷ The oak, despite its lowly smell, stood for strength, and often symbolized English nobility, or more generally national fortitude, but could also suggest sacred groves. Indeed, in one children’s story from the mid-nineteenth century, an old man named William Baker conducts a Sunday school under a gnarled old oak tree, his flock gathered peacefully at his feet to hear his Bible stories.¹⁸ Willows, because of their weeping form, symbolized death. In Uncle Philip’s children’s book, *The American Forest* (1845), the sympathetic interspecies connection is made this way: “when people are very much afflicted, they droop, and seem to be, as it were, weighed down with sorrow: the branches of the weeping willow hang drooping towards the ground; and their appearance, to a fanciful eye, has something of the character of mourning.”¹⁹ But willows could also allude to resurrection: they reproduce when a seemingly dead, broken limb lodges in a river’s bank. Apple trees tended to denote Christianity, but they could also be sinister, their fruits at once forbidden knowledge of good and evil and everlasting life.

If they were pictured with crooked, bent limbs, it often signified that the trees had witnessed too much human depravity, as is the case in Thomas W. Higgins’s *The Crooked Elm; or, Life By the Wayside*, a drivelly romance from 1857 whose narrative tension is provided by two dangerous men, the crooked elms. Mary Hinckley’s *Voice from the Forest; or, An Appeal from Nature in Behalf of the Temperance Cause* (1852), has the trees of the forest convening a sort of AA meeting in which the grains, fruits, and vegetables that have gone into making alcohol

Figure 3: Nathaniel Currier, *The Tree of Intemperance*, 1849. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.²¹

It's not a subtle image. The Tree of Intemperance is sickly and deformed, its branches either broken or heavily afflicted by Disease, Misery, Insanity, and Poverty; and it bears bitter fruit: Malice, Hatred, Idiocy, and Gambling. The blighted landscape tells us that strong drink is pestilential. In the country we've got degradation (the stump, the boulder, the rank weeds, the tumbling down cottage) and moral squalor (again, the dilapidated cottage, the abandoned wife and her children, the man selling off all of his family's possessions). Things are no better in the city, where men fight, or lean against lampposts for support. In back of the gin joint called "The Byron"—nineteenth-century viewers would have understood the allusion to the English Romantic Lord Byron's supposedly checkered life—there's a parasitic pawn-shop.

Many Christians found the cultural range of their sylvan literacy extended by a flexible ambiguity: trees could be temptingly evil, offering easy intemperance to those in need of a drink, dangling their fruits at susceptible Eves, or they could offer the shade of salvation, and Christian moralizers showed a weakness for arboreal allusions when it came time to proselytize. Indeed, countless references were made to that other tree in the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Life.²² Perhaps the most popular reference was the soul-as-tree, as in Moses Ingalls's *The Tree that Would Always Live* (1833): "AND HE SHALL BE LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY THE RIVERS OF WATER, THAT BRINGETH FORTH HIS FRUIT IN HIS SEASON; HIS LEAF SHALL NOT WHITHER; AND WHATSOEVER HE DOETH SHALL PROSPER."²³ But if you were not redeemed, if you continued to disbelieve, you were doomed to wither in neglect, as *The Barren Fig Tree* (1838?) makes clear.²⁴ We're all either dried up nonbelievers or the flowering saved.

Yet, it wasn't enough to craft pithy metaphors in the hope of convincing grown Americans to live a straight and true life—dissipation started ever earlier in the modern world. Mahlon Day, who believed that arboriculture and human culture were linked, wrote in his 1837 *Book of Trees*: “I hope my young readers are as fond of Trees as the printer of this little book...On the Boston Common, you may see Elms of stupendous growth, one particularly that spreads over enough ground for a small garden.” He reiterates, “I hope children will cultivate a fondness for trees. There is something, to my mind, that is worthy in it, to say nothing of its usefulness.”²⁵

There's a strange shift that I've noticed when, in the archives, I've replaced the temperance tract on my wooden book cradle with a work of children's literature, as if adult writers felt safer with youngsters, felt able to indulge their whimsical, non-rational, vaguely Transcendentalist urgings and get lost in an enchanted forest. As Emerson wrote, only a year after Day's book was published, “The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old.... Its effects is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right.”²⁶ There's a way that trees cease functioning as illustration, merely, and begin to inhabit a hybrid world, a world in which they have a sort of reciprocal agency.²⁷ As Day pointed out, cultivating trees cultivated the young mind: and so trees and children should grow up together.

In 1842, parents could buy for their children a small book, printed for the Christmas season, in which a prosperous farmer gives to each of his two sons their own apple trees. Boys become trees and trees become boys; One waters, prunes, and protects his; the other lets his go

wild, but it's not too late: when the diligent son harvests a rich load of apples, that Edenic fruit, his prodigal brother realizes the error of his ways, corrects his course, and over time trains both himself and his tree to grow upright, strong, and fruitful.²⁸ Occasionally these tales had a moralizing edge that bordered on something that we might call an ecological—or even a socially ecological—consciousness. The anonymous author of *Lessons from an Apple Tree* (1848) writes that nothing is more common than to see a pair of robins build a nest in a tree very early in the spring. “And many persons imagine that they have learned all [the tree and robins] can teach them. But let us just *consider* a little of what the tree, the nest, and the birds may suggest, if we will only be thoughtful and seek for truth, and possibly we may find more lessons coming to our hearts from the apple-tree, than we have ever learned from many books.”

And what was the most important of these lessons?

All things and all creatures are bound together, and live and flourish together. You may see the apple-tree as it supports the nest, tied, as it were, to the sun by rays of light, opening the little mouths in its leaves and roots to drink in the falling showers, bathing its branches in the all-surrounding air, and getting new breath and new life every moment; you may see this in your thoughts, and a great deal more, and see only what is strictly true. Now as it is with the apple-tree, so it is with you. You cannot exist for an instant without help coming from abroad; you are joined to the creation, and to your fellow beings; you do not stand alone, and cannot live alone.

Looking at this truth, what does the apple-tree and the bird's nest say to selfishness; to boys and girls who take every thing, use every thing, enjoy every thing as if it were their own, made only for them, and never dream that they have any return to make for all the goodness which cares for them, or that they have any thing to do for others?²⁹

When Emerson's *Nature* first broke upon the American literary landscape in 1836, it helped to triumphally proclaim the birth of something new and modern. “Our age is retrospective,” begins the famous Oedipal first line: “The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe.... Why should we grope among the dry bones of the past” he challenged his readers.

Nature is a funny mix: typically modern in its rejection of the past, but also filled with an essential sympathy between humans and the natural world, Nature is, in the end, on our side, and we need to pay attention to the witness trees, Emerson says, if we humans are to realize our full potential: “Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other’s hands for the profits of man.” There are all sorts of ways that one could read passages like these—Emerson the arch-anthropocentrist? Emerson, ignoring social inequity? Emerson the budding radical?—though I think the essential point to notice is Emerson’s supremely up-beat confidence in “the kingdom of man over nature,” a modern kingdom that comes about by following Nature’s sympathetic ministrations.³⁰

But by the 1840s, it was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain such optimism in the essential fraternity of Nature and Nation. Indeed, in 1846, ten years after *Nature*, Emerson’s *Poems* debuted, and with them one entitled “Ode, Inscribed to W. H. Channing,” the poem—filled with sylvan allusions and decrying the “famous States/Harrying Mexico/With rifle and knife!” and “the jackals of the negro holder”; the poem railing against “He who exterminates/Races by stronger races/Black by white faces”—the poem whose memorable lines, “Things are in the saddle/and ride mankind,” bear witness to a creeping sense that hierarchy, domination, rank materialism, the extermination of Native peoples and the enslavement of dark-skinned others, in sum, the killing of Nature, were more characteristic of the modern age than harmony.³¹ And so when the Apple Tree gave its lessons in 1848, I can’t help but hear something radical in its insistence on community—a community that includes “all things and all creatures.” It was 1848, after all, and the Tree spoke out in the face of a growing cultural ethic of individualist capitalism and infinite financial growth. America had just concluded its war with Mexico, a war committed to an imperialistic land grab and the extension of slavery, only a year

away from the gold rush that would see thousands from all over the world flock to California to scabble for riches, displacing American Indians, scarring hillsides, and choking streams with tailings in the process. That question, “what does the apple-tree and bird’s nest say to selfishness,” is an uncomfortable one, an unsettling one—a question often asked.

So it’s strange that such questions as these are typically glossed over when historians write of the nineteenth-century United States, whose cultural history tends to be told in two parts: the antebellum period, filled with abolitionists, suffragists, transcendentalists, Fourierists, Spiritualists, vegetarians, teetotalers, and come-outers—a period of cultural ferment, a period of possibility in which people throughout the nation seemed to be questioning nearly everything in a spirit of moral perfectionism. But after the Civil War, we tend to see American culture as congealed, homogenized, wholly devoted to the process of incorporation into the demands of the market economy. The Republican ideology of free markets, free land, and free men—the only real political ideology left in the wake of the war—metastasized into a justification for the domination of big business.³² To the extent that ambivalence toward the modern emphasis on “getting ahead” has been studied, historians have tended to see it as in fact paradoxically contributing to the cultural hegemony of capitalism.³³ And yet, despite the gale of post-war incorporation, there remained a firmly rooted commitment to unsettling the equation of Progress with financial gain, one that refused to bend to the will of the storm.³⁴ Indeed, soon after the Great Elm blew down, many writers put many pens to many leaves of paper. Included among the odes to Boston’s greatness, the patriotic gestures to a chosen nation—many of these trumpeting the triumph of business culture, it’s true—are poems like this:

Eleven sentries stood on guard,
Through triumph and through fears,
Eleven veterans who had warred,
With storms a hundred years.

Each calm and old, from foreign lands,
The President's ancient guest,
Whose shadow fell, like loving hands,
On struggle and unrest.

We doomed the trees, we think to build
By scorning what has been;
It is a friend whom we have killed;
Forgive us for our sin!

Gone are the elms, and with their fall,
Like frightened birds, the store
Of fresh old tales, from branches tall,
Has gone forevermore.

Give pity for the helpless tree
A century's winds have tossed,
And pity for those memories
That are forever lost.

But rather give them mourner's sighs,
And pity our disgrace,
And pity those, with blinded eye,
Who struck great Nature's face!³⁵

The tangible sense of loss in this poem, a chastened, belated realization of error, is startling, and I find myself reading over its lines again and again, trying to recapture something that, in fact, I've never known except through the archives. What must its effect have been on those who daily passed beneath the Great Elm's branches? Titled "The Victims," Mary G. Morrison's work appeared in a memorial collection of poems dedicated to the Great Elm and published in 1877; it's clear that Morrison felt Boston's most famous landmark, as well as the few other remnants of the trusting woods that had once covered the area, were unnaturally murdered when Bostonians "struck great Nature's face," when they threw over the past in favor of the gilded promises of industrial wealth. "We think to build/By scorning what has been/It is a friend who we have killed."

While it's certainly true that large-scale historical processes such as the development of capitalism and the ideology of Manifest Destiny have left their carcinogenic traces over much of nineteenth-century American history, what has often been hurriedly passed over, like the painstakingly-crafted narrative endnote crying out to be read, is the patient, vital resistance that also characterizes American culture.³⁶ Delicate blades of grass grow, as they always have and always will, pushing their way through a seemingly impermeable, highly modern, confidently lifeless landscape of asphalt, causing microscopic cracks to bloom into vast furrows, letting in the light, letting green living things take root. And some of these green living things grew into the trees that Americans celebrated—the Great Elms and Trees of Life, the apple trees with robins' nests in them.

They grew into witness trees.³⁷

It's an old term, witness tree, a surveyor's term, and it referred to a tree that stood at the corner of intersecting boundary lines. The surveyor would chop a mark into the tree's bark that would testify that here lay the end of one thing and the beginning of another. Though they might eventually topple, or have the uncommonly bad luck of attracting lightning, trees nevertheless were understood to be far more reliable witnesses—despite the weeping, gnarly scar that would slowly close around the mark—than the unpredictable human memory. It's worth mulling over the term for a bit: why, in an age that so vocally trumpeted the triumph over nature, did trees remain the supreme arbiters of Truth? The crack grows: does the witness testify to the past, or prophesy a future, and what do either of these look like? What is it that is witnessed: a crime, as in Emily Dickinson's poem from 1858?

I Robbed the Woods—
The trusting Woods.
The unsuspecting Trees
Brought out their Burs and mosses

My fantasy to please.
I scanned their trinkets curious—
I grasped—I bore away—
What will the Hemlock—
What will the Oak tree say?³⁸

Or something else: a divine revelation? A wondrous event that would be otherwise unbelievable? Do we believe the testimony? Can they even speak, or are they mute witnesses, things powerless to affect the processes they are forced to watch with knotty eyes? Again, why trees, something non-human, non-technological, seemingly non-modern?³⁹

Many of these witnesses—Mary G. Morrison’s Victim, the lesson-dispensing apple tree, the Old Elm appealing to its townspeople, Emily Dickinson’s Hemlock and Oak—actively contested the notion of Progress, seeking to redefine what “modern” America stood for: if the key metaphor of modernity has been the well-oiled machine whose inner workings can be exactly divined and controlled by a rational, skeptical human mind, if the machine metaphor separates the universe into two mutually exclusive and rigidly policed camps—the exceptional human mind and the inert, disenchanted natural world—then the very existence of a speaking, seeing, listening, singing, witnessing tree, a tree self-consciously scoffing at the modern scientific ban on pathetic fallacies, a tree that lives and acts, such a tree stands as a laughing rebuttal to the humorless modern notion that humans and nature, mind and matter, consumers and natural resources, god-image and subjugated earth are distinct categories, for a talking tree is a tree that can talk back, a living thing re-enchanting what modernity has tried so hard to enervate.⁴⁰ Talking trees are trees that can resist.

A young Thoreau confided to his journal in the early 1840s that, “resistance is a very wholesome and delicious morsel at times.” This was a theme he came back to throughout his life, and it’s of a piece with his constant blurring of the boundaries between human and natural: “The

twig always remembers the wind that shook it,” he wrote, “and the stone the cuff it received. Ask the old tree and the sand.” Of course, he wasn’t talking about just stones and trees—though we shouldn’t discount them, either—but himself and his fellow humans, as well. These cuffs, these blows must be withstood, Thoreau thought, and he took great courage from his wooden friends: “The spruce, the hemlock, and the pine will not countenance despair.” And so he set his mind: “We should strengthen, and beautify, and industrially mold our bodies to be fit companions of the soul,—assist them to grow up like trees, and be agreeable and wholesome objects in nature.”⁴¹ This was Thoreau’s resistance: to re-enchant himself and the world, to learn from the tree and the stone, to train himself to be agreeable and wholesome in nature, a member of a community, rather than an authority bending the world to his will.

It’s no mistake that Thoreau chose the phrases “industrially mold” and “grow up like trees” when describing his notion of progress. Though industry and trees might seem like antonyms, they don’t have to be. Industry has come to be associated with factories, with the production of commodities for profit, but it also means hard work and diligence, and Thoreau plays on these meanings, reappropriating “industry” for his own ends. Critics of American modernity and Progress, like Thoreau, have tended to be labeled anti-modern, and some of them were. Anti-modernity, however, carries with it not only the connotation of knee-jerk rejection, but also the criticism that anti-moderns nostalgically worshipped the supposedly more authentic, more clearly defined lives of pre-modern craftsmen, aristocrats, saints, or Noble Savages.⁴² Yet such an impulse was only one of many possible paths that critics could take. For some, the goal was not flight into a sanitized, golden, pure past—a sort of conservative reaction—but the creation of a present that fulfilled social and metaphysical needs.⁴³ For some, the goal was reanimation, reappropriation, reenchantment. What good were trains, or cheap cotton cloth, if

dull landscapes of degradation, slavery, exploitation, and monopolization were the costs? What good were all the financial gain and piles of cheap gewgaws if rot had already attacked the heartwood, and beauty had fled the world? The boosters of Progress pointed to the wealth, the opportunities for work, the relative political and social freedom in the United States, papering over howling hierarchy, but there were those who refused to let injustice go uncontested.

Thoreau and many others—including abolitionists, African American settlers, and tourists in New York's Adirondack Mountains; Western landscape and railroad photographers; and anarcho-socialist communards in the sequoias of California—looked around at the world they inhabited, and were dissatisfied. When they looked out over their surroundings they saw exploitation and degradation, but that wasn't all: these countermoderns saw a nation of trees, heard through ears sensitive to wooden sibilants a story in the making, heard the testimony of trees whose nearly perfect memories anchored them in a past and present even as these wooden witnesses foreshadowed an as yet unwritten future. And so these countermoderns sought not to turn away from the material blessings of modernity, nor the social ills that cast a long shadow over the U.S., but to redefine Progress in terms of something nobler, something like justice.⁴⁴

Though it might have been hazy and indistinct, they nevertheless perceived the outlines of a landscape of justice, and they understood that the physical world, the woods and rivers as well as the roads and farm fields and house plots and factories, was intimately tied to social, cultural, economic, and ideological processes. They understood that landscape was the interaction between the non-human and human worlds, that this offspring reflected certain intentions, and supported certain cultural values. Rather than stopping there, they clearly saw that landscapes are always in transition, that they are always negotiated spaces. They understood that their critiques were ultimately meaningless unless they changed actual, physical space.⁴⁵

When the Great Elm came down, Boston lost a part of itself. Newspapers around the country carried news of its demise. Poets sung its elegy, and though I can't prove it, I imagine quite a few voices joined in the refrain of John H. Hewitt's *Old Elm Tree* (1842):

In days of yore beneath its shade,
Our sires their infants' gambols play'd,
They laughed and sung, and so do we,
Under the shade of this old elm tree.⁴⁶

Trees, with their roots in the past and their top-most branches brushing the future, help us to tell ourselves who we are, and where we are.⁴⁷ Nineteenth-century Americans knew this, knew that it's more than a linguistic accident that trees and humans both have crowns, eyes, limbs, trunks, crotches, and feet—some trees, like the cypress, even have knees. Trees and people both grow gnarled and crabbed; in the spring, the sap rises in us, and in the winter of a tree's life, it might sprout Old Man's Beard. Trees wave in a brisk breeze, and people stand rooted to the ground. Trees groan in the wind, or sigh, or whisper, and though it's hard to catch what they have to say, many in the nineteenth-century nonetheless stopped to listen.

PART ONE

River Tree:

Henry David Thoreau's Countermodern Cartography.

BEECH

*Where my imaginary line
Bends square in woods, and iron spine
And pile of real rocks have been found.
And off this corner in the wild,
Where they are driven in and piled,
One tree, by being deeply wounded,
Has been impressed as Witness Tree
And made commit to memory
My proof of being not unbounded.
Thus truth's established and borne out,
Though circumstanced with dark and doubt
Though by a world of doubt surrounded.*

-Robert Frost, 1942.¹

1.

A steel-guitar wind shimmies through willow's whips, making them sigh, awww, whisper, involuntary, vital as a breath. But for the accident of a willow's fertile catkin or a sprouting twig caught in the mud at river's side, the dominant sound on this stretch of the Concord River would have been the round purling of the river itself, here in one of its swifter stretches, mixed with the deep rumbling of wagons, carts, and coaches on the two roads to the south and west of the wooden witness.² Willows love water. If planted by a dispersed seed carried on the wind or water's current, its radicle would have emerged first, an embryonic root burrowing downwards, against the day and hoping for it as well, anchoring the seedling to the river's bank, seeking water, seeking the river, finally mingling its woody, rooted permanence with the water's never-ceasing, ever-changing flow. Aboveground, the tree's limbs and leaves yearned for the glorious morning even as the willow poured over the bank, providing shade, providing the illusion of permanence, providing strings for the wind to slide over.

When Henry David Thoreau stood under this tree behind his friend William Ellery Channing's house, readying his boat for the river's current and their day's adventure, he wouldn't have heard an aeolian harp, or sometimes a violin, and the sound never ceased to stop him in his tracks, to force him to contemplate the sublime. He stammered, groped for the right words, finding them only in repetition and revision: "It told me by the faintest imaginable strain, it told me by the finest strain that a human ear can hear...that there were higher, infinitely higher, planes of life which it behooved me never to forget."³ Maybe, on this July day in 1859 he heard nothing at all, and was too busy readying his bark, gathering gear and notebooks—and undoubtedly one of the fine Thoreau pencils he had helped his father craft—all the while talking over with Channing which stretch of the river they would spend their day observing. But he did

notice the willow on the river's bank, and on those busy, happy summer days of 1859, his eye often fell on the notch he had cut low in the tree's trunk.⁴

It was but a moment's work to make the chips fly, and he had only to square himself to the tree's trunk, twist at the waist, and strike a few good, angled blows. If his axe was sharp it would have sliced neatly through the bark and the inner living layers of wood until it bit into the dry, hard, subcutaneous meat of the tree. But I'm guessing Thoreau's was not—when he wrote *Walden*, he claimed to glory in its dull bit—and so he instead bashed away at the willow for a while, finally leaving a ragged gash that, nevertheless, sanctified the tree a witness.⁵

In that summer of 1859, when Thoreau sunk his axe's bit into the bark of that willow, rooted in the ground beside the bank of the Concord River behind Channing's house, he joined himself and his tree to a long narrative tradition, a genre of story telling.⁶

2.

Thousands of similar trees have dotted the American landscape inscribed by thousands of axe-wielding men, and from European settlement on, surveyors have been cutting marks into trees denoting the bounds of property and of empire—they still do. As the juggernaut America lurched westward there was always a surveyor in the vanguard, with many more behind. Daniel Boone, when he wasn't hunting, trapping, or fighting Indians, shot survey lines on the very margins of colonial and early post-Revolutionary America. Lewis and Clark, wending their way west, took hundreds of measurements and notations on the land over which they traveled. The Pathfinder, explorer John Charles Frémont, ran for president on the Republican, Free Soil ticket in 1856, and the maps that his surveyor, Charles Preuss, drew were instrumental in expanding America's territory. Surveyors—often accompanied by painters or photographers—were the

guiding lights of the railroad crews spiking rails to ties across the nation in the 1860s, and were key figures in laying out state and national parks, the first national green refuges from the machine age. Two of the “Lazzaroni” who helped to create the modern discipline of American science—Alexander Dallas Bache, and first head of the Smithsonian, Joseph Henry—were surveyors.⁷ Even George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln spent time with compass and transit, eventually swearing a scared oath to defend the very boundaries that they had helped to blaze.

Yet even a president cannot defend his country’s territorial possession indefinitely. That job, it seems, requires something a bit tougher, a bit more reliable: a tree. Which isn’t to say that various other methods weren’t tried to make the brain equally tenacious to scarred bark. Thoreau recounts a story told to him of a boy sent to “witness the placing of the bounds” of his mother’s plot. When the surveyor had driven his stake and piled a little cairn of stones, he cut a stout switch and tried to grab hold of the child in order to give him “a blow which would have made him remember that bound as long as he lived.”⁸ But the surveyor failed, and even if he hadn’t, there was nothing to guarantee that the child wouldn’t light out for the territories when he grew a bit older. Far better to cut a few notches into a tree than stripes into a child’s back, for these woody witnesses and the bounds they represented stood mute testimony to the surveyor’s passing long after he had forgotten its location, had indeed been forgotten himself—which is the point, really: a single, discrete landmark would be entered on a surveyor’s map, but it was the woods, the real, material woods that would guide anyone with a compass, surveyor’s chain, and a copy of that map, to the truth.

Though notching a tree with an axe was an activity as old as surveying itself, the connotation of every blazed American tree began to change with Thomas Jefferson’s Ordinance

of 1785.⁹ Rather than settle territory haphazardly, the newly birthed United States sought to streamline the process, to rationalize expansion. A new nation, in the New World, needed a new method of laying itself out, and that is why Americans began to inscribe the grid—that checkerboard perfect method of dividing up land—onto the land. Even parts of New England, settled before the perfectly parallel lines were plotted across the landscape, came to be measured according to the rage for square corners and straight lines and linear narratives.¹⁰ Anchoring this grid to the earth, naturalizing it, were the witness trees standing sentinel at the corner of each six-mile-square township, America’s building block.¹¹

It can be hard to fully appreciate the impact that the grid has had on American culture, politics, economics, and society precisely because it seems such a natural feature. But try this: try to think of modern American life *without* thinking in terms of gridded space. The roads in vast sections of the country—from central New York on west to California—religiously try to obey the commandment that thou shalt not converge except at right angles. I’ve appreciated this many times as I’ve planned runs around my home, here in Ithaca, New York. When most everything is laid out on a one-mile square, planning a 4, 8, or 16-mile run is simple: I run north for two miles, then take the second road that comes in on the right. That road runs east, and I stay on it for two miles, then turn south for two miles, and then west, and before I know it, I’m home. As it turns out, this part of New York was a testing ground for the national grid, and its story is a narrative whose plot line was replicated with every move west, from 1785 on: first the land was cleared of its original inhabitants—in the case of the Finger Lakes region, General John Sullivan rampaged through the area in the 1770s to extinguish American Indians and their claims to the land. Then the head surveyor came with his instruments, pens, and paper, a part played in by 1790 Simeon DeWitt, who divided the recently emptied lands into plots intended for Revolutionary War

without thinking of land. Look closer, and the grid underlies seemingly everything: perhaps your university was originally created by a railroad-baron whose wealth, whose very railroad itself, depended on the gridded parcels of land doled out by the Federal Government as economic incentive. Or maybe you attend a land-grant school, maybe you have taken classes in its Morrill Hall—Cornell has one, and I sweated through a summer’s worth of Spanish classes inside its four parallel walls—named after the Vermont Senator who, in 1862, proposed that square sections of western land be sold to finance public education. Or perhaps you’ve taken advantage of the Morrill Act’s offshoots: the cooperative extensions and agricultural field stations that seem to be everywhere in rural America. The grid even follows us to the dinner table: those tomatoes in your salad, the wheat in your baguette, the corn in your Budweiser, the soy-based tofu in your stir-fry were all very likely grown on gridded ground, harvested by machines mechanically passing back and forth along the rows of gridded fields, and transported along gridded spaces all made possible by the transforming power of the surveyor’s transit.¹⁴

The grid promised rationality, and democratic access to the land’s productive capabilities—a sort of spreading of the wealth, and it’s worth remembering that these promises were originally utopian. Though pinning down exactly when the ideal of rectilinearity first captivated American imaginations is difficult, it does seem that the love affair began in the late 1670s with William Penn and his mid-Atlantic colony. When he and his surveyor general, Captain Thomas Holme, dreamed Philadelphia into existence, their vision was of orderly, well-mannered streets converging always at right angles. Much more than a sort of aesthetic fetish, Penn’s city was most likely a response to the twin scourges of plague and widespread fire in London in 1665 and 1666. Pestilence and inferno, thought Penn, had no place in his city: they could only retard the growth of brotherly love, and so his answer was to fence them out behind

the grid.¹⁵ By the 1780s, city planners across the new nation were modeling each of their own little Cities Upon a Hill on Penn's innovation.

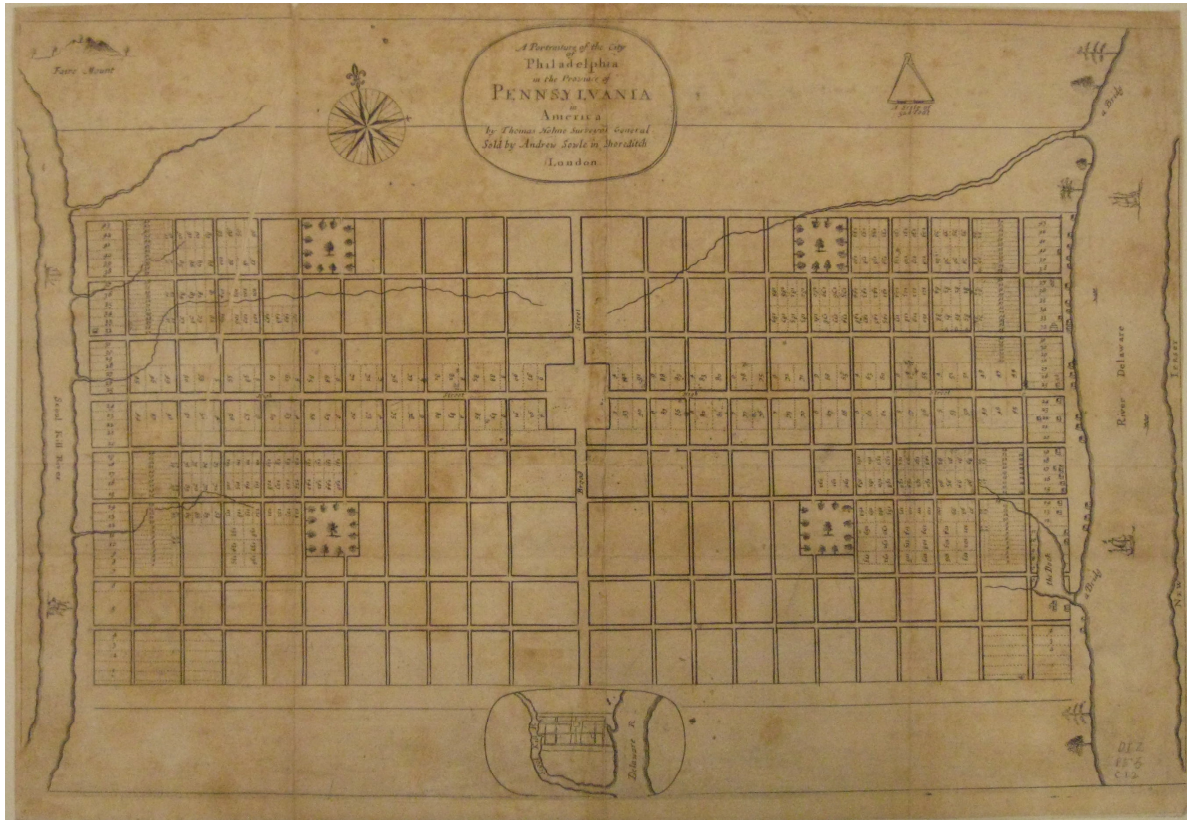


Figure 5: Thomas Holme, "A Portraiture of the City of Philadelphia in the Province of Pennsylvania," 1812. Courtesy, Cornell University.¹⁶

It wasn't until after independence from Britain that the grid took on truly national pretensions, when Jefferson latched onto the idea as a way to ensure orderly westward settlement and the growth of democratic institutions. His fascination with gridded space was not simply an aesthetic fancy, but partly a reaction to the headaches, political intrigue, and disenfranchisement which seemed to come with the southern system of settlement and surveying—a free-for-all of “indiscriminate corruption” by men whose only claim to qualification was, well, their claim to being qualified.¹⁷ Though we like to think that Daniel Boone always migrated along with the moving frontier because he needed wilderness to survive, it actually seems that this failed way of

surveying—one in which the same parcel of land might be sold to many different buyers—was one of the more pressing concerns encouraging Boone, Surveyor and Failed Land Speculator, to pull up his stakes and head west.¹⁸ Jefferson's plan, therefore, was to map the land *before* settlement, identify its resources, divide it up into easily identifiable and measurable squares, and parcel it out intelligently to small yeoman farmers.¹⁹ This was the age of Enlightenment, and here he is, the systematic and democratic cheerleader for practical, enlightened thinking:

This bill proposes to lay off every county into small districts of five or six miles square, called hundreds, and in each of them to establish a school for teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic.... These schools...annually...chuse the boy, of best genius in the school, of those whose parents who are too poor to give them further education, and to send him forward to one of the grammar schools...of the boys thus sent in any one year, trial is to be made at the grammar schools...and the best genius of the whole selected.... The ultimate result of this whole scheme of education would be the teaching of all the children of the state reading, writing, and common arithmetic: turning out ten annually of superior genius...turning out ten others annually, of still superior parts.... The general objects of this law are to provide an education adapted to the years, to the capacity, and the condition of every one, and directed to their freedom and happiness.²⁰

It's all got the rational precision of a well-tuned machine, but of course Jefferson had his poetic, mystical side as well:

We have an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman.... Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phaenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example.... It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution.²¹

A democratic people, then, depends on virtue and education, both ultimately rooted in the soil. Jefferson wasn't alone in his belief, and, indeed, some version of the mystical nurturing power of the American landscape grew thickly: during the Revolution, patriots, to show their revolutionary zeal, chose trees liberty trees as early witnesses testifying to this defiantly

democratic people. The American republic's very soil was composed of democracy, and in those who tilled it and planted it, who fed its transubstantiated body to their children, who rooted *themselves* in it, in these people lay the hope of the nation, and of the world. Jefferson envisions the "manners and spirit" of the people as a tree, susceptible to the canker of urbanization—of landlessness, of dependency upon a wage—which brings with it blight and rot. And so a nation of small democratic agrarians, enlightened tillers-of-the-earth, was God's chosen nation, from the soil on up.²²

Yet, despite nothing but the very best of intentions, the grid—and with it, Western surveying and mapmaking in general—has come to be vilified as an abstracting, disconnecting, even anti-democratic institution. As early as 1851, Thoreau himself seems to have been speaking with outrage against those who would profit from relentlessly dividing up the landscape:

I saw...some worldly miser with a surveyor looking after his bounds, while heaven had taken place around him, and he did not see the angels going to and fro, but was looking for an old posthole in the midst of paradise. I looked again, and saw him standing in the middle of a boggy, stygian fen, surrounded by devils, and he had found his bounds without a doubt, three little stones, where a stake had been driven, and looking nearer, I saw that the Prince of Darkness was his surveyor.²³

This was a theme to which he would return throughout his life, and near the end of it, he elaborated his contempt for surveying and surveys further:

How little there is on an ordinary map! How little, I mean that concerns the walker and lover of nature. Between those lines indicating roads is a plain blank space in the form of a square or triangle or polygon or segment of a circle, and there is naught to distinguish this from another area of similar size and form. Yet the one may be covered, in fact, with a primitive oak wood, like that of Boxboro, waving and creaking in the wind, such as may make the reputation of a county, while the other is a stretching plain with scarcely a tree on it. The waving woods, the dells and glades and green banks and smiling fields, the huge boulders, etc., etc., are not on the map, nor to be inferred from the map.²⁴

Surveying, Thoreau seems to argue, has turned land into an abstracted, exchangeable commodity and the resulting landscape is alienating because it effectively empties space of things like birds,

and “primitive oak woods,” as well as people. It empties the landscape of time, of history.²⁵ How little life there is in an ordinary map.²⁶

Thoreau’s critiques are powerful, though not at all obvious, and because of their subtlety I think we can easily miss them. Take the first point, that the American spatial imagination has turned land into an abstract commodity. Before the grid, land had an intrinsic value—at least in the North: in colonial and early-republican New England the best land was that which was the richest, the most fertile, the most productive of life, and it was originally parceled out to a town’s inhabitants in a manner that seems distinctly strange to our modern thinking. The fields, meadows, woods, and deposits of useful materials like clay or lime, the material components of town life, were owned in common, and even the extractive mills and mines were understood as public utilities, operating solely for the public good rather than private gain. Of course, this was no utopia, and there was speculation, exploitation, and a race for wealth that left many behind—none more so than the region’s American Indian populations. Nevertheless, social health in early New England was understood to rely not so much on the ability of a lucky few to grow enormously rich at the expense of everyone else, but on the relative prosperity of the entire town.²⁷

Revising landscape in terms of linearity, however, required an entirely different way of thinking about the land, as Thoreau well knew. Back in eighteenth-century England, the “first really ruthless capitalist class,” the agrarian capitalists who seized the commons from the commoners and divided the suddenly empty land up amongst themselves, discovered that fantastic profits could be bled from the earth and its inhabitants if the physical ground could be abstracted, could be changed from a thickly real, inhabited plot to a notion, merely.²⁸ What these agrarian capitalists helped to do, and what their followers in the U.S. and indeed, throughout the

western world realized is that one could shift the focus from the content to the package. Land, in the new reckoning, was just land. For centuries it had mattered who had farmed what piece, who was buried on it, who grew what on it—the land was inhabited, and every parcel was unique environmentally, culturally, and socially. But with the advent of agrarian capitalism, there was too little time, and too few forthcoming profits, to worry about such particular stories; and so attention shifted from the plot to the outline, from the land itself to its borders, from irregular particularity to rationalized square package, and the contained space was imaginatively expunged of everything that might set one place apart from another—which is the very point of commoditization: it makes it possible to imagine every sack of grain, every pen, every pair of blue jeans, every french-fry, every square section of land as exactly alike. Particularity gets scrubbed into conformity, the value of any commodity known and predictable and thus tradable. Nothing sticks out. It became increasingly possible, especially in the U.S. to see land as an interchangeable, uniform commodity, neatly divisible, like a dollar—if you couldn't afford to purchase a whole section, you could break it for change: half-sections, quarter sections, and on down to the ubiquitous 40-acre plot, the terrestrial equivalent of a penny—especially with the passage of the nineteenth-century's various land acts, beginning in 1841 with the Preemption Act.²⁹

Back in New York City, the physical layout of space was being conscientiously designed throughout the nineteenth century to do one thing well: make money, even at the expense of the population's physical well being. That's why the streets are so perfectly adapted to accommodate traffic and why building lots tend to be narrow, deep, and sunless, and stuffy—precisely the right form for cramming in as many storefronts per block as possible.³⁰ The City and the western pattern of farm fields, for all their differences, have a genetic similarity, and can be seen as

landscapes of mercenary individualism, landscapes that celebrate a private gain dependent upon private property.³¹ Of course, it is too simple to say that the older land ethic died away instantly and without a trace. Indeed, much of the tradition of resistance to capitalism that we have in the U.S. begins with the assumption that land should benefit us all, and this assumption has actually been written in the ground, all across the nation: one can take refuge from the bustle of 5th Avenue in New York City's Central Park, most Midwestern towns surround a centrally located public green space—a descendent of the commons—and, indeed, the garden city movement of the later nineteenth-century, with its lawns and curvaceous, tree-lined streets, was an attempt to plan urban spaces for human, rather than economic, needs.³²

Nevertheless, the nineteenth-century did see the rapid explosion of a marketplace whose existence fundamentally depended on the commoditization of land, and as many scholars have pointed out, it appears at first glance that the notion of American space as fundamentally empty and a-historical, wild, *natural*, put there by God for the profit of Progress ruled the day.³³ Look anywhere and you'll find it. Chicago is a perfect example: the entire city, whose rise to world economic prominence was nothing short of meteoric, was made possible by a few enterprising land boosters and the gridded space that appeared empty on the map. Chicago's Board of Trade, founded in 1848, existed for no other reason than to profit from the standardization and commoditization of grain, which was grown on standardized, commoditized land. Indeed, the French political scientist, Emile Boutmy, was surely on to something when he wrote, "the striking and peculiar characteristic of American society is, that it is not so much a democracy as a huge commercial company for the discovery, cultivation, and capitalization of its enormous territory."³⁴ The craze for continued growth, for ever increasing profits, is mirrored by the grid whose brilliance lies in the fact that it was designed to be endlessly reproducible, designed to

grow. It represents a “spatial fix”—at once both a proposed solution and a wracking addiction—to physical and economic expansion.³⁵

A final fact: the very first business trust in America was named the North American Land Company.³⁶

Yet, for all the direct influence surveying exerts on our lives, this still feels awfully abstract, a sort of master narrative that, though powerful, feels distant, disconnected from our daily lives. That is precisely part of its strength: it lies right on the surface, hidden in plain view, everywhere. The situation is made even more complicated by the absence of any master villains in this narrative, no Mephistopheles who foisted this way of imagining space onto us. Nevertheless, as all of the scholars who work on cartography show, our own local spaces and our own local maps are built on many of the presumptions of emptiness and perfect representation that every one of us, to some degree, has internalized, as Thoreau lamented when he visited Cape Cod in July, 1857:

Some of the inhabitants of the Cape think that the Cape is theirs and all occupied by them, but in my eyes it is no more theirs than it is the blackbirds', and in visiting the Cape there is hardly more need of my regarding or going through the villages than of going through the blackbirds' nests. I am inclined to leave them both on one side, or perchance I just glance into them to see how they are built and what they contain. I know they have *spoken for* the whole Cape, and lines are drawn on their maps accordingly, but I know that these are imaginary, having perambulated many such, and they would have to get me or one of my craft to find them for them. For the most part, indeed with trifling exceptions, there were no human beings there, only a few imaginary lines on a map.³⁷

It's tempting, out of a sense of misplaced resistance, to skeptically declare all spatial representation bankrupt—Thoreau wrestled with his distrust even until the very final pages of his last journal—and indeed one criticism that can fairly be leveled at many poststructuralist readings of landscape is that they, too, trust nothing.³⁸ The problem with this is that we have no choice but to imagine the space around us, we have no choice but to be in the landscape, to

interact, mold, and in turn be molded by it. The notion that we cannot even think without relying on some conception of space is wrapped up in the very roots of modern Western philosophy: “Space is a necessary *a priori* representation, which underlies all outer intuitions. We can never represent to ourselves the absence of space, though we can quite well think it as empty of objects,” wrote Immanuel Kant in the 1787 edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*.³⁹ Lest one begin to object that space is purely a western concept, people as diverse as the Apache, the various groups living in what is now Thailand, Aboriginal Australians, the Amerindian populations of Guyana, and Indians from the subcontinent all made maps—though not necessarily the kind that would be recognizable to a Western surveyor—all made landscapes out of the places they inhabited.⁴⁰ And we can be sure that not a single one of these was all-inclusive, was as real and detailed as the space it sought to portray. While the critical insight that many of our contemporary thinkers make should never be lost—indeed, it is probably the first step towards reimagining a less violent, less exploitative space—it is not clear that such criticism offers any workable alternative, and one can be forgiven if the impression left after reading through much of this literature is that the Western spatial imagination—almost uniquely—is characterized by violence, exploitation, state control, and a fixation on capitalism. That the US, and indeed the West as a whole has no historical precedent which can help us to imagine a better, more just world. That there is no hope. This is precisely what the radical geographer David Harvey urges us to rethink in his *Spaces of Hope*: “part of the work of postmodernity as a set of discursive practices...has been to fragment and sever connexions.... But it is now time to reconnect.”⁴¹

3.

Would Thoreau have known, as he stood on the bank of the Concord on that summer's day of 1859, listening to the wind in the willow and letting his eye rove over the tree's notched trunk, the part he played in the unfolding drama of American space? Would he have reflected on his role as one of the many leading characters in the birth of an American space made safe for capitalism? He certainly did enjoy following his feet wherever they decided to take him: "I trust the walkers of the present day are conscious of the blessings which they enjoy in the comparative freedom with which they can ramble over the country and enjoy the landscape, anticipating that future day when...walking over the surface of God's earth shall be construed to mean trespassing on some gentleman's grounds, when fences shall be multiplied and man traps and other engines invented to confine men to the public road."⁴² And yet, here he was, readying his boat for a surveying trip, he and his compass responsible for the creation of a great many woodlots and fenced-off property lines in the town of Concord. For make no mistake, Henry David Thoreau, beloved American nature writer, philosopher of wilderness, loafer supreme and enemy of work was a highly trained, very-well regarded, disciplined land surveyor.⁴³ And what's more, I'm pretty sure he loved it.⁴⁴

Not that he didn't have bad days. After a long surveying job in September of 1851, the invective flowed easily from his pen: "I find that I have in some degree confined myself,—my vision and my walks. On whatever side I look off I am reminded of the mean and narrow-minded men whom I have lately met there."⁴⁵ This fear of the dulling influence of the surveyor's gaze upon his poet's landscape vision—the fear which caused him to lash out at his neighbors—remained a nagging, hollow insecurity, one that never left. In 1858, after weeks spent sighting lines back and forth through the woods surrounding Walden Pond, the woods which had been his

home for two years and to which his imagination often returned, he seems to have come close to a leaden despair:

I have lately been surveying the Walden woods so extensively and minutely that I now see it mapped in my mind's eye—as, indeed, on paper—as so many men's wood-lots, and am aware when I walk there that I am at a given moment passing from such a one's wood-lot to another's. I fear this particular dry knowledge may affect my imagination and fancy, that it will not be easy to see so much wildness and native vigor there as formerly. No thicket will seem so unexplored now that I know that a stake and stones may be found in it.... What a history this Concord wilderness which I affect so much may have had! How many old deeds describe it,—some particular wild spot,—how it passed from Cole to Robinson, and Robinson to Jones, and Jones finally to Smith, in course of years! Some have cut it over three times during their lives, and some burned it and sowed it with rye, and built walls and made a pasture of it, perchance. All have renewed the bounds and reblazed the trees many times.⁴⁶

And yet, there's something of the sublime in Thoreau's words, something that speaks of deep time, of a human culture thickly intertwined with the natural landscape, and finally something of survival against long odds. After all, he reminds us, there are still trees left to be blazed, still woods through which a surveyor may roam, still mysteries and histories to explore.

Indeed, it seems like surveying inflected nearly everything in Thoreau's life, from his writing—here's one of the famous passages from his well known essay, "Walking": "when I go out of the house for a walk...I find...that I finally settle southwest.... My needle is slow to settle"—to his appetite: "I have been surveying for twenty or thirty days, living coarsely, even as respects my diet,—for I find that that will always alter to suit my employment,—indeed living quite a trivial life."⁴⁷ As befits one with an indecisive needle, a single day after his musings on the connection between employment and hunger, another spent in the woods with compass and map, Thoreau found himself settling down with his journal, dipping his quill in his inkpot, wiping off the excess on the underside of the desk, and penning these words: "I felt the influence

of the sun. It melted my stoniness a little. The pines seemed like old friends again.... This varied employment, to which my necessities compel me, serves instead of foreign travel.”⁴⁸

Here, I think, is the key, the crucial link overlooked by those who see in surveying only a monolithic institution of exploitation: Out of our daily toils and experiences, we pick and choose, we connect across boundaries, we fashion purpose, we invent ourselves and our place in the world.⁴⁹ “The boundaries of the actual are no more fixed and rigid than the elasticity of our imaginations,” Thoreau would say.⁵⁰ And for someone with such an expansive frame of mind, surveying could serve the countermodern purpose of forging connection, of fighting abstraction, of resisting the commodification of the land and its inhabitants.⁵¹

Thoreau began surveying sometime in the 1840’s, and by 1849 was in enough demand to start keeping a separate journal devoted entirely to his survey work.⁵² This was the very era in which Americans were most fascinated by surveying and exploration, and American literature is filled with tales of scientific men in romantic, dangerous places. In 1839, J.N. Reynolds, after nearly sailing to Antarctica, heard tales of a great white whale that rammed whaling ships and wrote the story up as *Mocha Dick; or, The White Whale of the Pacific*. Melville read it and thought it would make an even better story with his hand on the tiller, so he added a few hundred pages on cetology, and in 1851 released *Moby Dick*.⁵³ When Darwin’s *The Voyage of the Beagle* debuted in 1845, it became the “Victorian equivalent of a bestseller.”⁵⁴ And perhaps the leading intellectual of the age, the explorer, scientist, and polymath Alexander von Humboldt, had been a huge sensation in America. Americans of all stripes celebrated the centennial of his birthday in 1869: the *New York Times* devoted its entire front page to him, while Boston’s Louis Agassiz—a scientific celebrity in his own right—delivered a long oration on his significance; statues were unveiled, orchestras tuned-up, knowing allusions to Humboldt’s massive *Cosmos* dropped.⁵⁵ The

daring surveyor-explorers, especially those who headed expensive, ambitious, multi-year projects, were counted among the leading men of their age: the Frémonts, F.V. Haydens, John Wesley Powells, Clarence Kings, and George Wheelers.⁵⁶ Theirs were the romantic surveys, filled with danger and excitement, and their reports sometimes read, if not like pulp fiction, then at least like Edgar Allan Poe-esque tales of hardship, strangeness, and sublime beauty.⁵⁷ Truly, this was a culture that was fascinated by the transit's prospects, the discoveries of a compass, the allure of a long walk in unfamiliar territory.

It was into this cultural current that Thoreau launched himself, and he very quickly became a passionate scholar of surveying whose research into his field went far beyond laying out woodlots, measuring property boundaries and town lines, and planning roads.⁵⁸ The mysteries of terrestrial magnetism—the way that the difference between true north and magnetic north changed over time, even over the course of a day—haunted him. He even communicated with William Cranch Bond, the head of the Harvard Observatory, on the subject in 1851 and visited the Cambridge Observatory and Library in order to conduct further research.⁵⁹ This is all the more remarkable given that he didn't even own his own compass until 1850—before then, he borrowed one from his mentor, an older local surveyor named Cyrus Hubbard.

Though Hubbard may have helped guide the younger surveyor through the basics of the trade, Thoreau put in long hours on his own, poring over a copy of Charles Davies's *Elements of Surveying*: for instance, Davies notes that “in using the compass, it is important to ascertain the exact angle which may be included between the magnetic meridian” and true north, and that “to guard against...sources of error, the reverse bearing should be taken at every station.”⁶⁰ In all kinds of weather, during all times of the day, Thoreau fretted about the precision of his instrument and seemed to live with the constant fear that it was slowly creeping away from

exactitude. He constantly shot back-bearings as a means of checking his sightlines, and the theme of variation was so important to Thoreau that it even shows up in one of his most famous essays, “Walking.”⁶¹ Indeed, by 1851 the language of surveying creeps evermore into his prose, and variability becomes an obsession.⁶² Thoreau, the flute-playing dreamer, checked and rechecked his measurements compulsively, performed the difficult task of calibrating his compass to the north star, and filled pages of his surveying notebook with vast columns of minutiae.⁶³

That Thoreau was scrupulous in trying to weed error out of his measurements should not be surprising: most nineteenth-century surveying manuals were adamant that accuracy demanded a steady eye, firm hand, and exacting mind as well as precise instrumentation.⁶⁴ Lewis M. Haupt, in *The Topographer, His Instruments and Methods* (1883), sprinkles the text of his manual with a mix of prescriptive and descriptive injunctions that are concerned as much with the character of the surveyor as with his actual ability to take accurate sightings: “The topographer must be a man capable of correctly interpreting the face of nature, and of giving such intelligent graphical expression to his impressions, that a person unfamiliar with the ground may obtain, for all practical purposes, a sufficiently accurate knowledge of its features to enable him to decide the questions at issue.” But surveying is not purely discovery, and Haupt tentatively indicates there is an element of art necessary for the discipline: he speaks of impressions rather than truths, and the difficulties of mastering the artistic representation necessary to turn personal impressions into a graphical form accessible to all. Haupt continues, “This involves a careful training of the eye and hand...the exercise of judgment in laying out and prosecuting the work...physical alacrity and endurance in the collection of the data, courage in making a reconnaissance in the enemy’s

country...In short, the requirements are such that only a person of good judgment, temperate habits, active temperament, and scholarly attainments can hope to excel in this profession.”⁶⁵

All of this seemingly extraneous emphasis on cultivation was part of the mid nineteenth-century current of widespread reform: religious revivalism was sweeping the country, along with temperance societies, educational improvement, a growing abolitionism, women’s suffrage, experiments in socialism and communal living, and a prophylactic Victorian attitude towards sex.⁶⁶ And so it only makes sense that a spotless personal character was to be expected of those given the task of creating an American landscape. To be a successful textbook surveyor, one would have to possess an engineer’s mastery of technical drawing, an artist’s gaze, a scholar’s learned attainments, the strength and bravery of a soldier, and a recognition of the importance of personal virtue. One must, it went without saying, also be a man, and Haupt strays beyond the geographical, imagining not just the landscape, but letting his surveyor’s eye wander over the contours of the right sort of American male: one who would pay attention to his physical habits and characteristics such as the length of his stride, the height of his eye above the ground, the length of his reach—“this, in a well proportioned man should equal height”—the width and breadth of his hand, and the rate at which he covered various types of terrain.⁶⁷ It almost sounds as if Haupt was imagining the author of Thoreau’s textbook, Charles Davies, a West Point graduate and professor of geology as well as one of the nation’s foremost translators of French mathematics.⁶⁸

What is tantalizing about many nineteenth-century surveying manuals, including Thoreau’s, is their fear-tinged acknowledgment of the messy, representational, *subjective* role that personal experience played in surveying. Numbers, precise measurements, and discrete notations were but the raw material from which a rational, refined landscape was made. It took

art, inspiration, to turn coordinates into geography, but an unbounded imagination, one that wandered while on the job, was a danger. The very possibility of land as a knowable, predictable, stable commodity depended on the surveyor's subjectivity remaining hidden. Nothing must stick out. Hence the constant emphasis on personal virtue and self-restraint. If the conceit behind mapmaking was that one could accurately, precisely, *naturally*, capture ground-level realities, then sloppiness threatened to give away the map's bluff of mirror representation.⁶⁹

Yet, Davies wasn't nearly the Thoreau's most important tutor, though the discipline would serve the Transcendentalist well. "Even the facts of science may dust the mind by their dryness," wrote a Thoreau, perhaps bored by a textbook's wooden prose, "unless they are in a sense effaced each morning, or rather rendered fertile by the dews of fresh and living truth. Knowledge does not come to us by details, but in flashes of light from heaven."⁷⁰ And so, perhaps the most important influence on Thoreau's surveying work shows up on a scrap of paper buried deep in the Concord Free Public Library's Archives: it is a small rectangle, on one side listing seven surveying books, the oldest from 1570, which Thoreau intended to consult on a trip to the Cambridge Library. But flip the scrap over, and read the following prose poem out loud:

ice in brooks – get in apples –
frozen pond caddis worm & bottom – wild apple
lost beauty – begin to freeze
not get into woods at once – shake
off village & study & business –
The clean air – finer and purer warmth
of though – Fair Haven skimmed over
though mercury is low not feel
cold – the landscape so clean & pure
& dry – trees stripped of leaves – look as
through a washed window – the meadow [illegible]
swept – River not frozen – Muskrat –
boats drawn up – Light soft white
waving grass in path. Wondered that
dry leaves did not blaze – Ind. Sum
through winter. Shrub oak fine (show

all difference. Wild cherry leaves – oak
do – blueberry Same plant as before
little more killed. grows purple in horizon [sic].⁷¹

It is as if the surrounding world broke into his disciplined mind, leaving its strongly sensed traces everywhere.

4.

In the fall of 1851, Thoreau resurveyed the town line of Concord. It was an old New England tradition for the town's selectmen, once a year, to walk their lines, to become witnesses knowledgeable of their jurisdiction. But because of legal issues that had recently arisen, this was the first year that the selectmen had chosen to include a surveyor in their number. And that surveyor was Thoreau.⁷² Though he doesn't necessarily let on to it—his account, on the surface, seems unremarkable—he was excited, honored to be asked to help reaffirm the town's boundaries:

Perambulated the line between Concord and Acton, from a split stone near Paul Dudleys, & another near the Powder Mills, and found one intermediate boundary stone & every public road excepting the new road of the Powdermills, making 7 in all, also one in the wood west of the Factory, and one on the bank of the river at the Powder Mills. Agreed to remove the last a tree new road on a line between the nearest stones. The stones are all on the north side of their respective roads excepting the one on the Harvard road, so called...and Mr. Loring's there are thus 9 intermediate stones in all [sic].⁷³

As was usual, he also recorded the day's adventure in his personal journal:

Commenced perambulating the town bounds...Mr. ----- told a story of his wife walking in the fields somewhere, and, to keep the rain off, throwing her gown over her head and holding it in her mouth, and so being poisoned about her mouth from the skirts of her dress having come in contact with poisonous plants...-----described the wall about or at Forest Hills Cemetery in Roxbury as being made of stones upon which they were careful to preserve the moss, so that it cannot be distinguished from a very old wall.

Found one intermediate bound-stone near the powder-mill drying-house on the bank of the river. The worker-men there wore shoes without iron tacks. He said that

the kernel-house was the most dangerous, the drying-house next, the press-house next. One of the powder-mill buildings in Concord? The potato vines and the beans which were still green are now blackened and flattened by the frost.⁷⁴

Here is Thoreau, the trained, exact surveyor actively creating a map of Concord's cultural landscape at the very same time he was employed in the more quotidian pursuit of checking its boundaries. His entries tell us of death's economic balance-sheet, for powder leveled troops as well as mountains and forests—"The willow reach by Lee's Bridge has been stripped for powder," he had written a month before his perambulation.⁷⁵ They tell us of commerce and communication with the larger port-city of Boston; of the potential for a fine education waiting at the other end of the Harvard road. We learn that poisonous plants grow, and we hear what might be a bit of gossip, or possibly a morality tale about vanity, or maybe a lesson about the loss of local, rooted knowledge; and we hear of early efforts at historic preservation. Thoreau tells us something about the attempts to mitigate the hazards of large-scale industrialization and the defense industry: workers in the powder-mills—workers helping to make the munitions for the Mexican-American War, the one Thoreau had gone to jail for protesting, the one whose outcome meant territory, and thus more surveying work, for the US—these workers wore shoes without hobnails so that the simple, human act of walking, of striking one's feet on the ground, wouldn't throw sparks. And finally, Thoreau takes the time (he would say he improved it) to notice the change of seasons, to notice that the window in which certain crops could be cultivated was now definitively shut.

His journals are filled with these moments: When he surveyed the Bedford town line in 1859, Thoreau spared very little time noting terrestrial boundaries, and instead wrote, "I hear the *te-e-e* of a white-throat sparrow. I hear of phœbes', robins', and bluebirds', nests and eggs. I have not heard any snipes boom for about a week, nor seen a tree sparrow *certainly* since April

30 (??), nor *F.hyemalis* for several days.”⁷⁶ On June 10 of that year, he mentioned that he “cut a line, and after measured it, in a thick wood which passed within two feet of a blue jay’s nest, which was about four feet up a birch, beneath the leafy branches and quite exposed. The bird sat perfectly still...while we drove a stake close by.”⁷⁷ On Timothy Brooks’s farm, Thoreau explicitly took note of every individual parcel of land, and its use: the peach orchard, rye field, calf pasture, hill pasture, south and north meadows, garden, asparagus field, chaise house, the east and west woodlots, lower field, pear field, long field, rocky pasture, and cornfield, among others.⁷⁸ What is being surveyed in these instances, property, merely? A deep web of economic, agricultural, and personal connection? The cultural landscape? What does Thoreau’s survey stake call attention to, private land, or the jay in its nest, the witness bird, belonging only to itself? Indeed, this confusion between inanimate property and living creature is perhaps a key to what Thoreau is doing. He’s not avoiding the world of work in order to celebrate the natural order, nor running away from an increasingly modern world. His surveying journal is full of entries that mention his labors in laying out new roads or surveying the property of schools, and he constantly uses the Fitchburg Railroad—the very symbol of the modern age, and whose whistle echoes throughout *Walden*—as a point of reference.⁷⁹ This is not an artificial division of the world into the human and natural, but a triangulation between the two, pinpointing the connections that emplace a person in a deep context that is at once cultural, economic, and natural.⁸⁰ Timothy Brooks is literally rooted, not just in a modern, capitalistic system, but also in the ground, in a place, and it is in this act of emplacing Brooks that Thoreau frustrates attempts to render land simply an interchangeable commodity.⁸¹

Thoreau’s observations of those things supposedly external to surveying are as exact as his concerns with the variation of his compass, and if we could find that line that Thoreau cut,

perhaps we could still stand under the leaves of what would now be a very old birch, thinking about boundaries, hearing the harsh caw of a blue jay.

This subjectivity, this willingness to remain undisciplined and focus his attention on boundary stake as well as blue jay, is what the protocols of surveying were explicitly meant to efface, yet Thoreau allowed his mind to wander from the strict task of sighting a straight line to the sounds and wonder of the world surrounding him.⁸²

He even brought his outside writing to work with him.

Moonlight is the best restorer of antiquity. On a mild night, when the moon shines full, the houses in our village have a classical elegance, and at such an hour remind one of the most famous and excellent in art...We never tire of certain epithets which have been gradually bestowed on the Harvest and Hermit's moon. There is something pleasing in the fact that the irregularity in the rising of the two moons, and their continuing to rise nearly at the same time for several nights was observed by the husbandmen before it attracted the attention of science...All great laws are commonly known to the simplest necessities of man before they become the subject of science.⁸³

The entire piece takes up a quarter of a page; the rest is filled with surveying notes made while in the field. Thoreau was correcting this piece in pencil, perhaps the same pencil he used to make his surveying notes, and I imagine him resting on a stump or pumpkin, his compass standing idly nearby—had it's needle settled, I wonder?—composing a bit of an essay that disavowed the grandeur of the very pursuit he was engaged in, actively transgressing the borders between science and art, work and contemplation, nature and the human world.

Of course, this could be nothing but moonshine, the wayward thoughts of a surveyor as he goes about his business. One could certainly argue that scribbling a few lines in a journal, penning some lines on birds or beauty when taking a break from the day's work shows a faulty work ethic, an escape rather than an attempt at imagining an inclusive cultural landscape.

5.

Walking through the town's woods, stopping every half-hour or so to retie the knot in his bootlaces which seem to be forever dragging loose on the ground, Henry mentally ticks off where he is, what he's done there before, what well-loved landscape feature might be coming next.⁸⁴ It's been a rough month, this July of 1853. On the surface, of course, things are progressing nicely: plenty of surveying work to be done, plenty of sunshine on his face and warm summer breezes at his back—just the other day, in fact, he saw a marvelous pea-green emperor moth nearly as big as a bird, and got to savor the wild tangy juice of the season's first blackberries. But this job surveying the Bedford road leaves him less time for his passion.⁸⁵

Experiences are wonderful, he thinks, but what do they mean? What does a person's life add up to?

Surely much more than a one-thing-after-another chronology of dates and events, merely; surely there's some narrative thread, some answer to the question he'd been mulling over ever since he stood, buffeted by the damp, fog-laden winds on the summit of Maine's Mt. Ktaadn: "who are we? where are we?"⁸⁶

Even now, the memory of the North Woods, the prickly blue-green smell of balsam and adventure, of the wild, stirs something deep within him, stirs him to look upon the pines of his native town with new eyes, as if he had freshly awoken from a nap.

With it—here it comes!—rides a sense of melancholy, a sense of alienation, a sense that he doesn't quite fit, or that what he wants, what he thinks is impossible, unrealistic, an attempt to square the circle. "What if we feel a yearning to which no breast answers?" he'll ask himself in a few years. "I walk alone. My heart is full. Feelings impede the current of my thoughts."⁸⁷

Sometimes he thinks of himself as a white pine—the king’s tree, singled out from all the others for its straightness, its strength, its crown which can be spotted from miles away spreading over the tops of the forest’s other trees, and for this very reason excluded, marked as different. “The emblem of my life,” he remembers writing. “It stands for the west, the wild. The sight of it is grateful to me as to a bird whose perch it is to be at the end of a weary flight.... The pine tree that stands on the verge of the clearing, whose boughs point westward; which the village does not permit to grow on the common or by the roadside; which is banished from the village; in whose bough the crow and the hawk have their nests.”⁸⁸

He thinks of his cabin on Walden Pond.

Henry knows he just has to wait these moods out—they always pass, even if they always return, and it helps to write, to try to make sense of his musings with pen and ink. But time to write is exactly what he’s short on right now. Plus, he has all sorts of things besides melancholia to work through. Surveying, for instance.

But just here, here at the moment when work threatens to take over space meant for living, Henry finds the cracks that always let in the light. After all, he reaffirms to himself for the thousandth time, he’s a surveyor: his job is to notice.

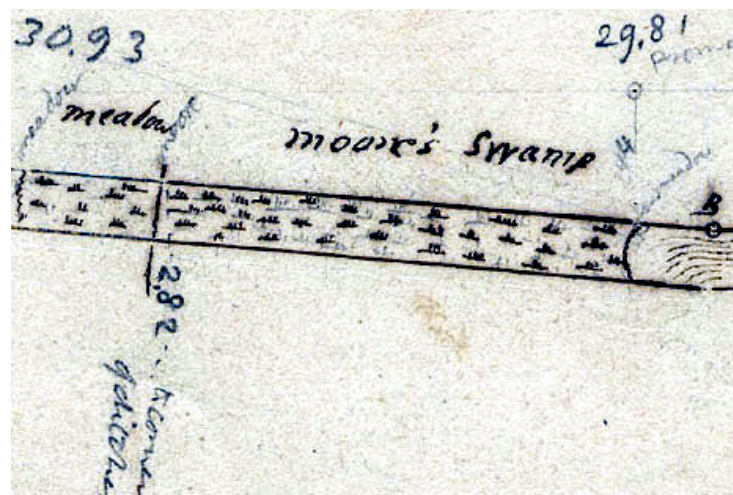
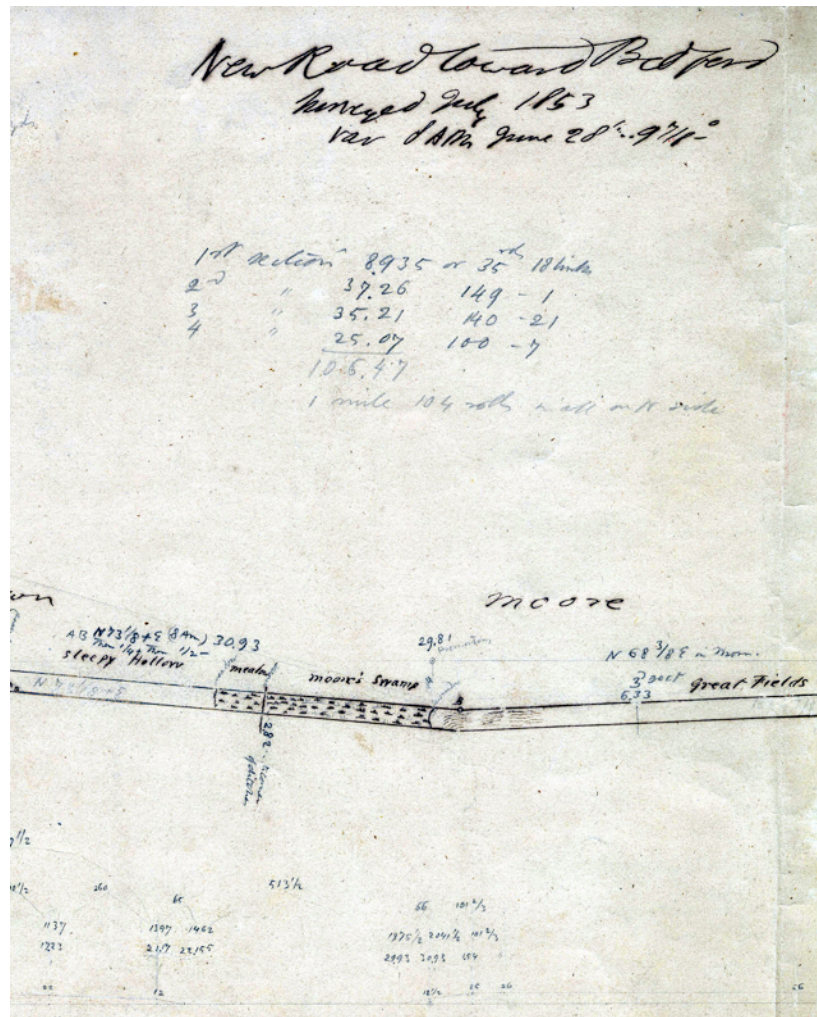


Figure 6: Two details from Thoreau, "New Road Toward Bedford...July 1852." Courtesy Concord Free Public Library.

On the 6th, for instance, a quaking bog in Moore's swamp by the side of the road caught his eye even as he peered at his compass.⁸⁹ When he felt like he had put in a good day's work shooting lines and sketching in boundaries on the map for his employer, he sauntered over to it and jumped up and down a time or two—for the sheer joy of it—to feel the rocking of this supposedly firm ground, which, in reality, floated on open water. He then cut and peeled a sapling. The knife sliced enjoyably through the tree's rough bark; and on that day it dawned on Henry how cool and sappy the fresh living wood was, "as if it extracted coolness from the cool cellars of the earth," he would later realize.⁹⁰ After sounding the bog's depth by slipping the wand through the floating crust down into the dark water beneath, and finally down deeper, down to solid ground, he stretched out full length upon his stomach, and drank of the clear, cool, botanical water. Hands gummy from his erstwhile measuring rod, he marveled at all the decayed wood just below his lips, on the other side of the water's surface. How long had it been there? How long had wood been falling into Moore's swamp, building up the real land he now rested on, drew imaginary boundaries across, pushed sapling through to the water beneath? Something started to sprout in his mind, a line he'd been working on for a long while: "Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is."⁹¹

Looking around—it had suddenly gotten late—he noticed plenty of larch in the swamp, that strange tree that is neither deciduous nor evergreen, but a bit of both, and realized that the not-too-distant distant Pendrick's swamp also boasted a profusion of larches. "Do not the trees that grow there indicate the depth of the swamp?"⁹² Now that he had sounded the depth of Moore's morass could he, by association, surmise the depth of Pendrick's? Was there some

lesson here, some metaphor to be extracted, applied widely to Nature? If only, he thought, he had more time to write.

Later on in the month Henry discovers that the seasons refuse to stay put in his mind. He wonders about this, what it can mean. He's a surveyor, after all, and compulsively records, well, just about everything: the Concord River's height, when different species of trees begin to leaf out and when they drop, when flowers bloom, when bathing in the river starts, when fishing begins.⁹³ He wants to know where he is, to hear the poetry of his place, and he's convinced that in paying attention to the comings and goings of people, seasons, animals, and plants, every day of every month of every year, that somewhere in all this lies great beauty. "Here I have been these forty years learning the language of these fields that I may the better express myself. If I should travel to the prairies, I should much less understand them, and my past life would serve me but ill to describe them. Many a weed here stands for more of life to me than the big trees of California would if I should go there."⁹⁴

So it's strange that he finds himself associating, "with or without reason," the idea of summer with "a cellar-like coolness," even as the spring, "the reign of water," (he chuckles at his own puns—he's a writer, after all), seems like a distant memory. And now that he's thinking about spring, he can't help but wander over into autumn. "The aspect of vegetation about the spring reminds me of fall. The angelica, skunk-cabbage, trillium, arum, and the lodged and flattened grasses are all phenomena of the fall."⁹⁵ Except that they're not: skunk cabbage starts to come out in early April and trillium flowers a few weeks later. Arum, or Jack-in-the-pulpit, flowers in the early summer, but still, these are not fall flora.⁹⁶

He knows this, knows that these unbidden associations are not playing by the rules, are not staying plotted in their proper coordinate locations. And yet, the very tangible delight he

feels in writing these space and time scrambling lines, in allowing his fugitive thoughts, his genius, free play over his mind's landscape, delights him.

Freed from his work on the Bedford Road by Saturday and week's end, he finds himself interjecting suddenly in his journal, "The wayfarer's tree! How good a name!"⁹⁷

6.

That willow: what did it witness?

On July 28, 1859, Thoreau wrote, "The black willows are the children of the river. They do not grow far from the water, not on the steep banks which the river is wearing into, not on the unconverted shore, but on the bars and banks which the river has made.... It is married to the river."⁹⁸ Perhaps there was no part of the natural world that captured his fancy more than the Concord River and the town's trees. After all, he wrote a book about each of them: *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* and *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*. His friend, Bronson Alcott, even pressured him to rename *Walden Sylvania*.⁹⁹ On the most literal level, when Thoreau chopped a notch into the willow's bark that summer, he did so in order to gauge the river's fluctuating height. This was the work of Henry David Thoreau, Surveyor a side of Thoreau inseparable from the author of *Walden*. From the giant of American literature who wrote, "The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history, stratum upon stratum like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and antiquarians chiefly, but living poetry like the leaves of a tree."¹⁰⁰ From the Thoreau who crowed, "The life in us is like water in the river. It may rise this year higher than man has ever known it, and flood the parched uplands."¹⁰¹

Rise it did. A flood-prone stretch of flat water is a pretty good description of the Concord River. In 22 miles it fell only 32 inches, and additional water filled up before it flowed out. The

rising tide was a mixed blessing, however, for though they could damage agriculture and property, a flood was also a prerequisite for creating Concord's lush Great Meadows: yearly inundation thickly deposited upstream nutrients across the Great Meadows, whose field grasses grew fat and sleek before being fed to the livestock which would eventually be turned into dairy products, meat, and leather.¹⁰² The River's Cyclical flooding was the ecological engine driving Concord's economy, and every farmer had an interest in the Meadows; into Thoreau's day they were mown communally, and in 1853 he recorded the yearly haymaking: "The Great Meadows present a very busy scene now. There are at least thirty men in sight getting the hay, revealed by their white shirts in the distance, the farthest mere specks.... The completion of haying might be celebrated by a farmers' festival."¹⁰³ Concord's economy worked, and worked well, as long as the high water came and left in time for the Meadows to dry out for haying season. But because of the river's sluggishness, any obstruction, whether natural or human-made, exacerbated the problems of flooding: if the water stayed up, then the hay was ruined. The seeds of a century-long struggle for Concord's farmers big came in 1798 when the Middlesex Canal Corporation downstream at Billerica dammed the river in order to create a canal linking the Merrimack River with Boston. It was the beginning of the canal age, and the Erie Canal, one of the greatest engineering feats of the nineteenth century, was only thirty years from completion. Upgraded in 1808 to service a mill, the new dam at Billerica raised the level of the river through Concord, impeding its drainage, and threatening Concord's livelihood, which, of course, resulted in a series of lawsuits and petitions to the state legislature that lasted throughout the nineteenth century, lawsuits that always seemed to be resolved in the interest of the mills.¹⁰⁴

In early 1859, petitioners in towns that bordered the Concord and Sudbury Rivers upstream from the dam at Billerica complained to the state that the dam—now belonging to

textile mill owner, Charles Talbot—had yet again raised the water levels enough to unnaturally flood the Concord’s rich meadows still more.¹⁰⁵ This was not an isolated grievance, but part of a much larger struggle taking place throughout nineteenth-century America, and legal cases such as *Gibbons v. Ogden* (1824), and *Charles River Bridge v. Warren Bridge* (1837)—cases that revolved around the relative rights of individuals, corporations, states, and the Federal Government to control who and how rivers were used—made it all the way to the Supreme Court. In many ways, Thoreau’s corner of Massachusetts was at the very epicenter of the wrangling over the increasing privatization of what had been traditionally understood as a commons, owned by all—after all, the famous Lowell mills were just a short boat trip downstream.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, by 1862 there were at least fifty-eight mills lining the Concord and its tributaries; as if the dam at Billerica was not bad enough, all of the upstream mills contributed to artificial flooding by periodically releasing *their* water into the river. Finally, the growing city of Boston needed clean water for its thirsty masses, and that water had to come from somewhere, which turned out to be the overworked Concord watershed. To compensate farmers for the water roused from its river’s bed, the Boston Water Board constructed a number of ponds whose timely release would keep the Concord’s levels high, even during periods of drought.¹⁰⁷ Picture, then, not a wild river flowing smoothly to the sea, but rather some hybrid of nature and machine, well regulated by timed withdrawals and deposits. All of this industry and urbanization, Concord’s farmers were convinced, conspired to destroy their livelihoods by turning the river into a mechanism, merely, the meadows into swamps. “These lands,” began one familiar with the debate, “are the most valuable in the State, for farming purposes, there is no doubt...it seems too bad that they should be rendered almost worthless, merely to accommodate a few old mills that are but little profit to their owners or anybody else.”¹⁰⁸

At the root of this dispute was an argument over what “improvement,” and its near cousin, “progress,” meant. It is not too much to say that the nineteenth-century was the era of improvement, a word that seemed to be on the tips of everybody’s tongues. William Ellery Channing the elder, father of Thoreau’s boating companion and the leading Unitarian theologian of his day, understood “improvement” to be the cultivation and refinement of one’s human qualities, and variations on Channing’s definition of improvement were widespread. That collection of Whiggish attributes so prized by the survey manuals—sobriety, artistry, restraint—are specific examples of Channing’s gospel of personal improvement. The notion had outward manifestations, as well: failure at a business venture was increasingly seen as a failure in morality, the inevitable collapse of an unreconstructed human nature. But improvement also had very material connotations, perhaps no more so than the Lockean notion that to improve something was to mix one’s own labor with it, to cultivate untouched wild nature into an Edenic garden, and thereby to claim it for one’s self. And so for Locke, improvement was the very foundation of private property and societal progress. The nineteenth-century Improvers, those farmers who advocated for a scientific approach to husbandry, one that emphasized conservation, personal rectitude, and practices akin to something that we might now call permaculture, were Locke’s well-to-do progeny, and Concord was filled with them; they even had an organization, the Concord Farmers’ Club, whose scrapbooks are filled with meeting notes and programs for talks on a whole variety of scientific, agricultural issues. Ease of travel, the quality of a region’s roads and canals, was another crucial outward sign of improvement, and one can see why the railroad became such a key icon of Progress in the self-image of America. Indeed, as the nineteenth-century wore on, improvement came to be evermore associated with technology, with concrete artifacts and far less with the sort of internal perfection championed by Channing.¹⁰⁹

What, then, was the best use of the river: to power mills which would churn out cheap commodities, aid the growth of towns, and help usher in an age of industrial capitalism, or as Concord's Improvers would argue, an integral part of a productive, progressive, profitable farming landscape? Who had the right to speak for the Meadows: the agriculturalists whose generations of sweat soaked the soil over which they communally toiled, or the mill owners for whom the Meadows were simply an economic externality, hardly worth taking into consideration beside the quantifiable good of a full-figured Concord?¹¹⁰

In an age that has come to be characterized as one of expansion—as territory was seized from Mexico on a pretext and slaveholders rubbed their paws in anticipatory delight for the new land's riches; as people streamed west on the overland trails and flooded into the Sierras in search of Californian gold in 1849; as American Indians were increasingly forced from their territory at bayonet point; as James K. Polk promised territorial acquisition, “fifty-four forty or fight!,” and violence was coming to be seen by some as a purifying cultural force; as the empire of capital improvement stretched its wings from sea to sea; as the term “Manifest Destiny” was being popularized and along with it the idea that America's fate was to dominate the continent, and perhaps the world; as the ideology, so familiar today, of successful, self-made men cut of the pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps cloth leading the nation to greatness in this age of Go Ahead came to the fore; as civilization, marked by steamboats and primary schools and cultivated ladies, seemed the only end in sight for the United States—even in such an age, there yet existed a vibrant culture of critique and dissent: if it's true that Thoreau's corner of Massachusetts was one of the epicenters of industrialization, it's also true that his stomping grounds were home to a stabilizing spirit of ambivalence and outright dissent.¹¹¹

“In the woods we return to reason and faith,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1836, and so signaled the opening salvo in a remarkable fight to redirect the trajectory of Progress.¹¹² Transcendentalists, centered in Concord and Boston, questioned nearly everything under the sun, from Orestes Brownson’s Christian socialism and working class activism—his 1840 essay, “The Laboring Classes” prophesied class warfare if profit continued to be squeezed from labor’s brow—to Theodore Parker and William Ellery Channing the elder’s anti-corporate, anti-industrial critiques; from Bronson Alcott’s anarchist commune, Fruitlands, and George Ripley’s nearby socialist community, Brook Farm, to Margaret Fuller’s remarkably wide-ranging support of prison reform, abolition, and feminism.¹¹³

In a less radical, and perhaps more ultimately influential way, the founders of Boston’s Mount Auburn cemetery—the first garden-style cemetery in the U.S., a style that would quickly spread across the nation, from Charleston to Cleveland, a style that was addressed as much to the needs of the living for quiet, green spaces in which to re-create, as it was to the needs of the dead—understood as early as 1831 that the capitalist dream of limitless growth was not merely pure fantasy, but killing in its refusal of limits. What the nation needed to hang on to, especially in the face of industrial modernization, was repose, was the willingness and ability to rest contentedly—a need that bridged class, gender, and racial differences. Indeed, it seems that the founders of Mount Auburn envisioned the cemetery as a “bigger, better, wilder version of the Boston Commons,” as Aaron Sachs has put it, dominated not by one Great Elm, but by a whole forest. Some of the designers of Mount Auburn-influenced garden cemeteries, like H.W.S. Cleveland, whose boot prints can be found all over the park system of Chicago and Minneapolis, even went on to become influential city planners.¹¹⁴

Dissent could even be found in one of the most unlikely of places: mainstream politics. Beginning in the 1830s, the Jacksonian Democrats from the North increasingly found themselves at odds with their Southern political kin over the issue of slavery. Often thought of as the party of workers, small farmers, and a small centralized state opposed to internal improvements, the Bank of the U.S., and growing corporate interest, the Democrats also had a reputation as Southerners: Jackson was, after all, a slaveholder from Tennessee. But some northern Democrats came to question the right of one person to hold another in perpetual bondage, and actively contested the role of the Slave Power in determining national policy. Had the nation been captured by the interests of powerful southern aristocrats? In the wake of the United States' annexation of Texas in 1845 and the subsequent invasion of Mexico a year later, it seemed frighteningly clear that the ship of state was a vessel owned and operated by slave traders. There were even radical land reform advocates who made up part of the northern Democratic left, folks like George Henry Evans, a freethinker, abolitionist, worker's advocate, and agitator for the free, democratic distribution of the nation's land to anybody suffering from poverty—including Indians and African Americans. Evans was associated with some of the well know communarians and utopian socialists of the day, including an abolitionist from upstate-New York named Gerrit Smith who would, in 1846, deed 120,000 acres of Adirondack land to 3,000 black New Yorkers in a bid to rid the U.S. of racism.¹¹⁵

Thoreau's voice joins this remarkable chorus, and reminds us that there were, there *are*, alternatives all around us. Here he is, ever the keen surveyor, calling attention to the empire's threadbare clothing: "This is the only way, we say; but there are as many ways as there can be drawn radii from one centre. All change is a miracle to contemplate; but it is a miracle which is taking place every instant."¹¹⁶

Unfortunately, it has been common to overlook both Thoreau's and his contemporaries' critiques as mere bluster. Even Emerson did it. In the 1862 eulogy for his deceased erstwhile disciple, the Sage of Concord famously criticized Thoreau for slacking: instead of "engineering for all America," he instead chose to be the "captain of the huckleberry party."¹¹⁷ But it seems that Emerson missed the point: the enjoyment of that perfect huckleberry, free to anybody, whose only purpose was to be attractive and reproductive, was the very best that Thoreau's nineteenth-century had to offer. And throughout his life, Thoreau the dogged individualist became ever more convinced that the selfish individualism peddled by boosters for the market economy tended *not*, as Adam Smith argued, to encourage diversity and freedom, but simplification and homogeneity. Thoreau argued that commoditized goods depended on commoditized people, whose aspirations and visions of the good life were all exactly the same.¹¹⁸ Yet, these perfectly homogeneous people did not entirely exist, despite the market's attempts at reeducation; and though he is often mistaken for a misanthrope, when Thoreau wrote "the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," he did so in a moment of great sympathy. He meant that the violence of the market, in its attempts to force conformity, left psychic amputees in its wake, those who felt that there was no alternative, no choice but to lead one's life according to the dictates of free trade, but whose severed dreams nonetheless considered to twitchingly remind them of what had gone missing. It left them in a silent panic. This is what Emily Dickinson captured so well in a poem from 1859:

Will there really be a "Morning"?
Is there such a thing as "Day"?
Could I see it from the mountains
If I were as tall as they?

Has it feet like Water lilies?
Has it feathers like a Bird?
Is it brought from famous countries

Of which I have never heard?

Oh some Scholar! Oh some Sailor!
Oh some Wise Man from the skies!
Please to tell a little Pilgrim
Where the place called “Morning” lies!¹¹⁹

“They honestly think there is no choice left. But alert and healthy natures remember that the sun rose clear,” reassured Thoreau, and the very fact that many people felt left out by the market revolution’s daydream nation was an invitation to look at the world through some other set of spectacles.¹²⁰ The moment that he left Concord’s jail for refusing to pay a poll tax which would have gone to support a war whose outcome—the expansion of slavery—Thoreau loathed, he went a-huckleberrying, wandering through sunlit fields in search of fruit and respite from the state and its boundaries.¹²¹ Yet there was no one better than Thoreau who understood how those boundaries were constantly being reinforced and extended throughout the course of the nineteenth-century, how the huckleberry fields, open and free to all, were being privatized, their fruit increasingly to be found only in the market:

It is true, as is said, that we have as good a right to make berries private property as to make wild grass and trees such—it is not worse than a thousand other practices which custom has sanctioned—but that is the worst of it, for it suggests how bad the rest are, and to what result our civilization and division of labor naturally tend, to make all things venal.... As long as berries are free to all comers they are beautiful, though they may be few and small, but tell me that is a blueberry swamp which somebody has hired, and I shall not want even to look at it.... We so commit the berries to the wrong hands, that is to the hands of those who cannot appreciate them. This is proved by the fact that if we do not pay them some money, these parties will at once cease to pick them.... This is one of the taxes we pay for having a rail-road.¹²²

7.

What was the best use of the natural world? Who best deserved nature’s fruits? Who determines the best use of a river? On March 24th of 1859, the State of Massachusetts appointed a Joint Special Committee to look into the Concord River controversy, to visit the areas affected

by the flood, and to report back to the Legislature. In May, the Committee visited Concord, noting that the “Great Meadows...had very much the appearance of a general inundation.”¹²³ Not to be left dead in the water, the concerned citizens of Concord themselves formed their own Committee of the Proprietors of Sudbury and Concord River Meadows to further their cause. One of their chief actions was to have every one of the river’s impediments to flowage—the dams and bridges—extensively measured and catalogued: “We have at length obtained from the justice...a fair opportunity to give proof of the great oppression and spoilation to which we and our fathers have been so long subjected. What is still better, we are favored with doing the privilege of doing this...in a partial and technical manner.... Under such circumstances we shall be not only inexcusable but suicidal...if we neglect the golden occasion for collecting, presenting, and *fixing* for all future discussion and for an enlightened final judgment, the overwhelming facts of our age.”¹²⁴ The rhetoric is heated, the solution technical: this was a matter for the strongest language, demanding the most subtle and exacting eye. After all, the Committee of the Proprietors felt the very survival of Concord was at stake.

And so on June 4, 1859, Simon Brown, one of Concord’s most successful agricultural improvers and Chairman of the Committee of the Proprietors, penned a letter to Thoreau, hiring him to ascertain the width of each bridge that crossed the Concord between Sudbury and Billerica, the characteristics of every pier that might jut out into the water, the history of each bridge’s construction and improvement, and the character of the falls at Billerica itself. Brown’s idea was that Concord’s farmers needed to know just how much every bridge impeded the river’s flow and how much of the meadow flooding could be blamed on Talbot’s mill. Thoreau understood that this was a question of historical geography as much as a task to be undertaken with measuring tape. And so he immediately set about researching, noting on the back of

Brown's letter maps he should consult, and local citizens whose long memories he could mine for crucial information.¹²⁵

He also hefted his axe and chopped a notch into the willow tree that shaded his boat in its resting place behind Channing's house.¹²⁶

Whether Brown and the rest of the Committee knew it or not, in Henry Thoreau, they had chosen an observer for whom the Concord River was the living, beating heart of the town, and had been noting the effects of private industry upon the river and on the public for at least eight years before Brown hired him. In one of his earliest journal entries, in the Spring of 1838, he seems seduced by the water's bodily presence: "For the first time it occurred to me this afternoon what a piece of wonder a river is,—a huge volume of matter ceaselessly rolling through the fields and meadows of this substantial earth."¹²⁷ By 1859, he knew that piece of wonder intimately: he had skated over most of its length in the winter, traveled over it with his brother John in 1839, imagined it in his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. He recorded the industry—the farming, the munitions makers, the mills—on the river's banks, the wildlife along its shores, as well as his own physical immersion in the landscape: "Bathing at Barrett's Bay, I find it to be composed in good part of sawdust, mixed with sand."¹²⁸

As with everything else that he loved, he measured it devotedly: beginning in 1850 his journal is filled with hundreds of entries on the river's height and temperature, which he would continue to monitor until, dying of tuberculosis, he could no longer leave his bed. All the while, the old fears of imprecision continued to haunt him, and so he relied on three separate benchmarks—the willow, a neighbor's stone steps, and a bridge truss—to try and drive accuracy into a corner.¹²⁹

Perhaps because of these perfectionist tendencies, Thoreau was also no stranger to legal proceedings, and he lent his hand to a number of cases involving the River's damaging floods. "I. Hapgood of Acton," he wrote in June of 1851, "got me last Friday to compare the level of his cellar-bottom with his garden, for, as he says, when Robbins & Wetherbee keep the water of Nashoba Brook back so as to flood his garden, it comes into his cellar.... Men are affected in various ways by the actions of others. If a man far away builds a dam, I have water in my cellar."¹³⁰ A few months later, as he returned along the railroad tracks from a cross-country saunter, Thoreau kept his eye out for a good place to bathe. Finding none, Thoreau noted, "Knight's new dam has so raised the river. A permanent freshet, as it were, the fluviate trees standing dead for fish hawk perches, and the water stagnant for weeds to grow in. You have only to dam up a running stream to give it the aspect of a dead stream...some speculator comes and dams up the stream below, and lo! the water stands over all meadows, making impassable morasses and dead trees for fish hawks."¹³¹ Then, in 1853, Thoreau entered the courthouse for the first time as an expert surveyor retained to show the devastating effects of industrial impacts on the river. He had been hired by Leonard Spaulding to check the height of a dam erected by William Benjamin, which Spaulding claimed flooded and spoiled his crops.¹³²

Temperamentally, as well, Thoreau seemed suited for the task. The river was his inspiration, his invitation to set his mind adrift, and when in a certain unmoored mood, he would write things like, "Men are inclined to be amphibious, to sympathize with fishes, now."¹³³ He had a long-standing antipathy toward the Billerica milldam—it blocked the migration of fish and the free play of thought, equally—and at one point in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, he addressed the shad whose anadromous migrations were cut off by the dam: "Perchance after a few thousand years, if the fishes will be patient...nature will have leveled the

Billerica dam, and the Lowell factories.” At another, Thoreau sounds like an East Coast Edward Abbey shouting Earth First!: “I for one am with thee [again, he’s addressing the shad], and who knows what may avail a crow-bar against the Billerica dam?”¹³⁴ By the late 1850s, he was growing more strident in his opposition to river improvements, for as he saw it, these dams had drained the very blood from the heart of Concord, leaving the landscape, leaving his fellow townspeople, in a perpetual torpor, an everlasting winter with little hope of a revivifying spring breeze.

If salmon, shad, and alewives were pressing up our river now, as formerly they were, a good part of the villagers would thus, no doubt, be drawn to the brink at this season. Many inhabitants of the neighborhood of the ponds in Lakeville, Freetown, Fairhaven, etc., have petitioned the legislature for permission to connect Little Quitticus Pond with the Ascushnet River by digging, so that the herring can come up into it. The very fishes in countless schools are driven out of a river by the *improvements* of civilized man...Our Concord River is a dead stream in more senses than we supposed. In what sense now does the spring ever come to the river, when the sun is not reflected from the scales of a single salmon, shad, or alewife? No doubt there is *some* compensation for this loss, but I do not at this moment see clearly what it is.... It is as if some vital quality were to be lost out of a man’s blood and it were to circulate more lifelessly through his veins. We are reduced to a few migrating suckers, perchance.¹³⁵

So it makes sense that Thoreau jumped at the opportunity to spend his summer on the river, plying its waters and plumbing its depths systematically, intimately, listening for “the dream of the toads,” which had graced some of his earlier surveying jobs, and thereby striking a blow against industry, against getting a living.¹³⁶

From June 22 to around August 22, Thoreau spent thirty-four days on the river, surveying, measuring, and observing. Or as Emerson put it, obviously in a bit of a huff over what he saw as wasted time spent away from his *true* work, “Henry T. occupies himself with the history of the river, measures it, weighs it, strains it through a colander to all eternity.”¹³⁷ He corresponded with older townspeople who may have witnessed the construction or modification

of the town's bridges, and the height of the river at various points in the past.¹³⁸ He sounded the bottom in hundreds of places—stopping every 1000 feet from Sudbury to Billerica, a distance of over 25 riverine miles—and in his mind's eye saw the river's bottom from a side view, saw the gullies and hills in the bed.¹³⁹ He gauged the river's height up to three times in a single day.¹⁴⁰ Finally, he submitted his report to the Committee of the Proprietors: a huge chart of statistics listing all of the crucial information the Committee could possibly have wanted. I can't imagine how difficult it must have been for Thoreau, the inveterate collector, to have trimmed his initial 33 pages of notes down to one single 15"x32.5" document—how do you succinctly describe your love?—but he did, and his employers must have been pleased with the result, for it exactly fulfills every instruction they had given him.¹⁴¹

There were, however, unexpected results from his survey, and I suspect these were the true profits Thoreau dreamed of when he accepted Brown's commission. The first is that the Thoreau who railed against the injustices of the Billerica Dam wasn't ever convinced that the Meadows *had*, in fact, been flooded by Talbot's mill. The ecological puzzle of how the Great Meadows stayed open, why they were not taken over by intrusive alders and other early successional species of trees and bushes, mystified him, and as late as 1856 he could only credit flooding—a flooding which had been occurring long before European settlement—as the responsible agent:

It is commonly supposed that our river meadows were much drier than now originally, or when the town was settled. They were probably drier before the dam was built at Billerica, but if they were much or at all drier than now originally, I ask what prevented their being converted into maple swamps? Maples, alders, birches, etc., are creeping into them quite fast on many sides at present. If they had been so dry as is supposed they would not have been open meadows. It seems to be true that high water in mid-summer, when perchance the trees and shrubs are in a more tender state, kills them. It "steams" them, as it does the grass; and maybe the river thus asserts its rights, and possibly it would still to great extent, though the meadows

should be considerably raised.... What is the use, in Nature's economy, of these occasional floods in August?¹⁴²

He is unsure. One can almost hear him scratch his head over the mystery, but he can't quite bring himself to assert with authority that the Billerica dam was to blame for the Meadow's flooding. He had once thought that the Meadows had actually been drying out in throughout the nineteenth-century, but after consulting a 1654 history of Concord in 1857, he changed his mind, and decided, that no, that the Meadows, were in fact wetter after the dam went in.¹⁴³ During the course of his 1859 research, the testimony of Concord's older residents seems to have convinced him of this, but, by October of 1860 he again waffled back and forth, seemingly swayed by whichever old timer he speaks with on any given day.¹⁴⁴ He never did fully settle on whether the flooding of Concord's Meadows was anthropogenic or not.

Yet, there was no doubt in Thoreau's mind that the river's flow *was* being artificially influenced, even if not by the dam at Billerica. Back in August of 1854, he had noticed that in periods of drought the river remained fairly high.¹⁴⁵ And while surveying for the Committee of the Proprietors in the summer of 1859, his willow tree told him that the river was rising when not a single drop of rain had fallen.¹⁴⁶ As a result of the hundreds of measurements he took of the river's height at various times every day, he had discovered that it was completely dependent on the action of the *upstream* mills, and he despaired that the very feature which he regarded as Concord's wild lifeline was, in fact, no more seemingly natural, no more separate from the capitalistic world of getting a living than the machines whose gears the river drove.

It was an organic machine, merely. "So completely emasculated and demoralized is our river that it is even made to observe the Christian Sabbath.... Not only the operatives make the Sunday a day of rest, but the river too, to some extent, so that the very fishes feel the influence (or want of *influence*) of man's religion. The very rivers run with fuller streams in Monday

morning. All nature begins to work with new impetuosity on Monday.”¹⁴⁷ What could be worse than a river so completely alienated from its unimpeded rhythm, its labor so improved and harnessed for accumulation that one could set one’s watch by it: “By a gauge set in the river I can tell about what time the millers on the stream and its tributaries go to work in the morning and leave off at night, and also can distinguish the Sundays, since it is the day on which the river does not rise, but falls. If I had lost the day of the week, I could recover it by a careful examination of the river. It lies by in the various mill-ponds on Sunday and keeps the Sabbath. What its *persuasion* is, is another question.”¹⁴⁸

And that one, the question of the river’s persuasion, was what most stirred Thoreau’s imagination during his months of river surveying, the question calling for all of his surveying talent. For despite the mills’ regulating effect, the river was alive, untamed even if it had been somewhat calmed.

Thoreau knew this, knew that flowing water will force its own course, that the path of least resistance sometimes leads directly through the most concrete redoubt of Progress. On a visit to the Billerica dam, Thoreau found himself “amused with the various curves of water which leak through at different heights.... The dam leaked in a hundred places between and under the planks, and there were as many jets of various size and curve.”¹⁴⁹ Bounded, but not caged. Impeded, never tamed. “It excites me to see early in the spring that black artery leaping once more through the snow-clad town,” wrote a Thoreau whose faith had taken a knock by his findings, but had not, ultimately, succumbed to the logic of industry. “All is tumult and life there, not to mention the rails and cranberries that are drifting in it. Where this artery is shallowest, *i.e.*, comes nearest to the surface and runs swiftest, there it shows itself soonest and may see its pulse

beat. There are the wrists, temples of the earth. Where I feel its pulse with my eye. The living waters.”¹⁵⁰

The river yet lived. This was perhaps Thoreau’s most wonderful conclusion, especially given today’s popular environmental discourse in which a weak, feminine Mother Earth is being assaulted on all sides by a rapacious humanity.¹⁵¹ And if Thoreau felt the river’s undiminished vitality pulsing in his vision—again, he deliberately makes his body an unbounded landscape across which sensual impressions of the outer world can slip their accustomed bounds so that vision can be felt—he sought to transform his intuition into something more concrete. He did this in one of the best ways he knew how, by drafting a gigantic seven-and-a-half foot map.

8.

When I saw this map for the first time, unrolled across three of the Concord Free Public Library’s tables, its surface covered in a riot of tiny figures, my reaction was similar to the first time I read *Walden*: what on earth was this? Thoreau’s bridge-surveying work didn’t require a map, and it is clear that he didn’t make his for the Committee of Proprietors: they didn’t request one, and to make a map for them wouldn’t have made sense—they wanted bridge statistics, not spatial relationships. Even though Thoreau’s map is an almost-final draft—drawn on thick architectural canvas, lettered neatly and in pen, ready to be sent to the engraver—there is no mention made of it in any of the reports submitted by the Joint Special Committee. And finally, the Committee already had a map, one endorsed by the very farmers who sought to level the Billerica dam, a map made by the well-regarded Massachusetts surveyor, Loammi Baldwin for an earlier river dispute in 1834, but which apparently was still considered up to date in 1859.

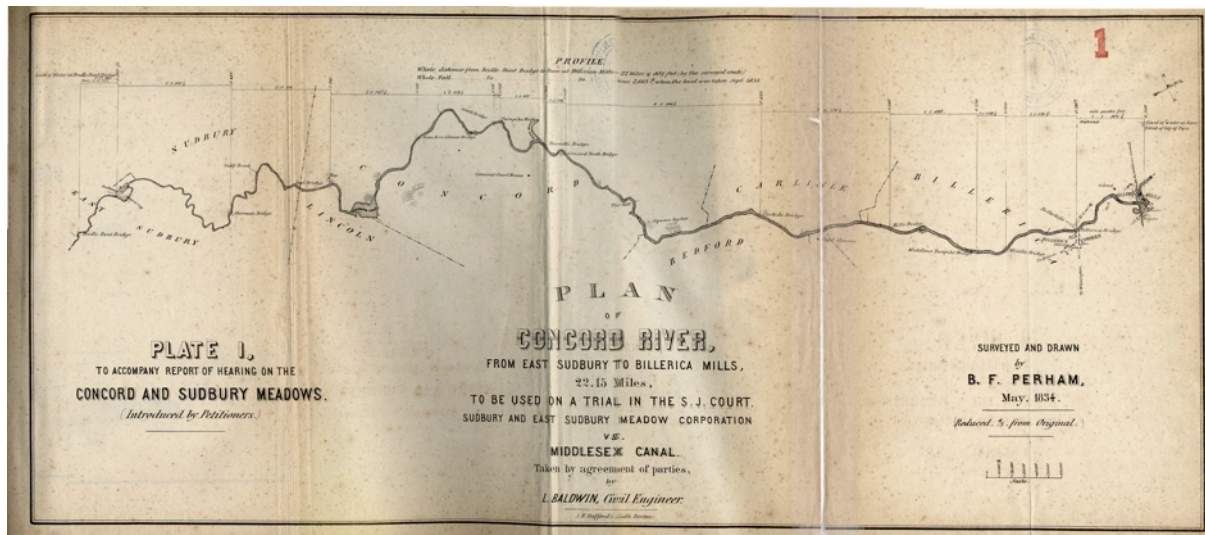


Figure 7: Loammie Baldwin, “Plan of Concord River from East Sudbury & Billerica Mills,” 1860. Courtesy Concord Free Public Library.¹⁵²

There is nothing about it that seems remarkable: the vertical fall and linear distance of the river are shown; political boundaries are shown; a few notable buildings are shown. That is to say, it looks like any other map: seemingly objective, naturalistic, reliable, passive, *true*. It claims to picture space as it really is. Focusing on the Concord section of the map, we can see that there is almost no human presence in this map at all, save the Court House. For that matter, there is really no non-human presence in this map either, save the river.

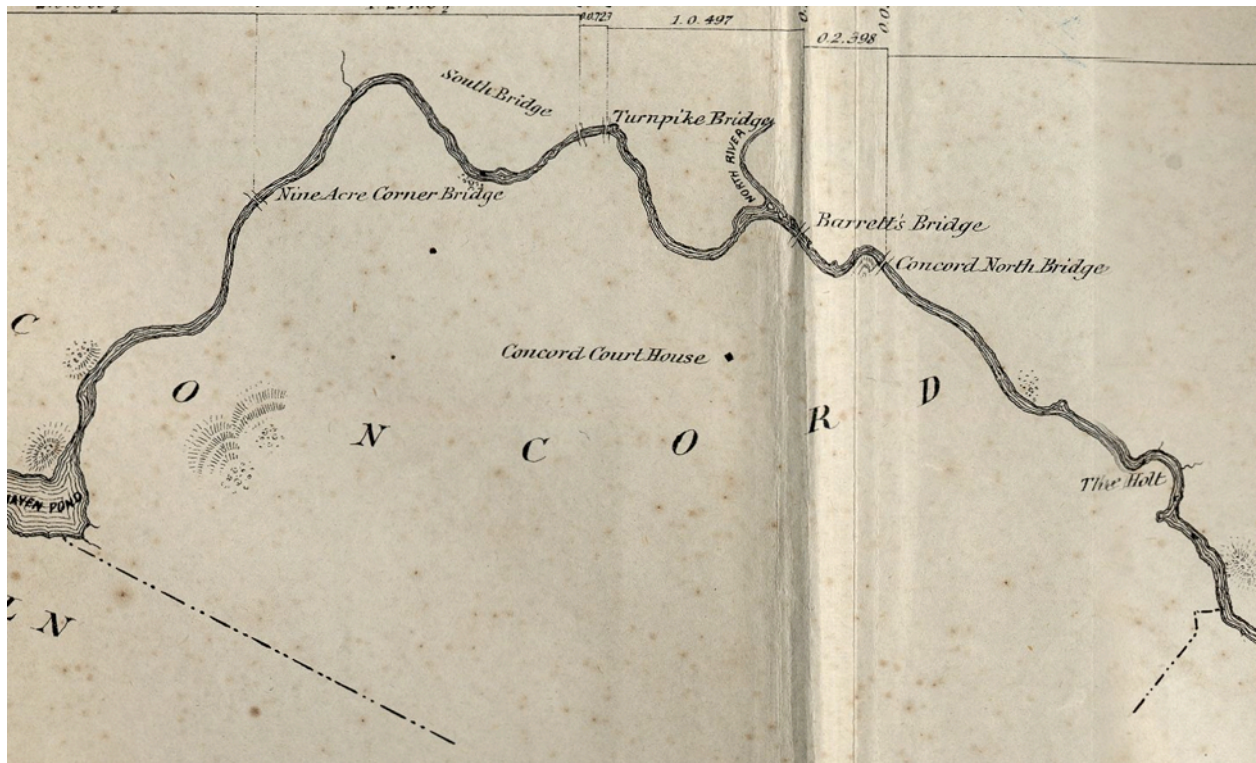


Figure 8: Detail from Baldwin, “Plan of Concord River,” 1860 Courtesy Concord Free Public Library.

It’s a map that shows empty, uninhabited raw space, and it gives us no hint as to what occurs in this landscape, what has occurred, or what should occur. What this map has decided is worth pointing out about the landscape is that a river exists. The state, in the form of the Court House, exists. Five bridges exist. Political boundaries, positively distinguishing Concord from Lincoln and Bedford exist. And at the very top of the map, the river’s vital statistics: length, 22 miles, 802 feet; vertical fall, 2.865 feet. All of these things, state, bridges, boundaries, measurements, rely on each other for their reality, they are ontologically equivalent. They all, the map tells us, truly exist.

But look again, lean in close, feel its pulse with your eye, listen carefully to its silences.¹⁵³ Where are the people? Where are the fields and the trees and the homes and the roads and the stores? Where are the landscape’s other inhabitants, the plants, the animals? Where are

all the things that are every bit as concrete, as real as the river itself? Make no mistake, Baldwin's map, though it looks entirely normal to our eyes grown used to such projections, is entirely fantastical. What is the point of a bridge hovering in space, the sort of bridge a surrealist might delight in, without a road? Or without a person to use the road? And that abstraction of the Court House: a black box, a minimalist drawing reducing form and color to its absolute basics. And those boundaries: by their inclusion in a map that seeks to portray Real Things, they are turned from imaginary lines into entities every bit as natural as the river itself whose length and breadth has been determined with an exactitude which demands respect—2.865 feet of fall over 22 miles 802 feet!—even as it is self-evidently absurd (.865 feet equals 10 and 38/100ths of an inch, a farcically precise measurement when charting a fluid object over the course of more than 22 miles).

What does this map really tell us about a cultural landscape called Concord?

9.

Have you ever had a true huckleberry? They are not for sale, they only come out for a few short summer weeks, and you have to compete with the birds and insects for them, but there are always plenty enough. They taste wild and invigorating, sweet and tart. They are small, much smaller than cultivated blueberries, but intensely vivacious. And they mean to be eaten, though they give no real material sustenance to humans, save pleasure. They are signs of renewal, of life. Eat them and scatter their seeds so that more huckleberry bushes might offer the world more of their fruit. Eat them, Thoreau says, because “they seem offered to us not so much for food as for sociality, inviting us to a pic-nic with Nature.”¹⁵⁴

10.

At the very same time he was mapping the Concord River, Thoreau was busily thinking through the problem of forest succession. The issue first caught his attention as he prepared to survey a neighbor's property: "One morning...as I was on my way to survey a woodlot in the west part of Concord, and passing a tract in the woods where a peculiarly dense and exclusive white-pine wood had been cut a few years before, but was now occupied as exclusively with shrub oaks, my employer...asked me that very common question, if I could tell him how it happened that when a pine wood was cut down an oak one commonly sprang up, and vice versa."¹⁵⁵ One of the results of this curiosity was a paper, "The Succession of Forest Trees," given on September 20, 1860, which became a lasting contribution to natural history: Thoreau is still credited as one of the first Americans to scientifically explain the phenomenon of the transmutation from pine to oak woods. He did this, in part, by relying heavily on Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, and it seems that he was the first American natural historian whose ear Darwin grabbed.¹⁵⁶

But as with his surveying, he listened to Darwin indirectly, passing by the parts about struggles for existence and possession, about certain individuals rising above the masses—those parts of evolutionary theory so beloved and endlessly repeated by apologists for a rapacious capitalism—to the Romantic Darwin who could write, "How have all those exquisite adaptations of one part of the organisation to another part, and to the conditions of life, and of one distinct organic being to another being, been perfected? We see...beautiful co-adaptations most plainly in the woodpecker and mistletoe...in short, we see beautiful adaptations everywhere and in every part of the organic world."¹⁵⁷ Thoreau's understanding of nature—stressing beauty, community,

interconnection—seems like an anarchist’s vision of mutual aid, in which the fullest development of an individual’s peculiar talents strengthens the whole community, in which the community exists precisely so that the individual may flourish, may lead a healthful, fulfilling life. And so forgetful squirrels—who can never quite seem to remember where all of their acorns are buried—become the key not only to the propagation of oak trees, but to the pleasure, wellbeing, and wealth brought to the owner of the land on which they spring up. Thoreau suggests, only half-jokingly, that we devise an annual ceremony in which we honor the squirrel for its blessedly spotty memory.¹⁵⁸

Life, wildness, all in sympathy, all struggling together for mutual sustenance against hierarchy; even the willow is involved in this ecological and political crusade:

Ah willow, willow, would that I always possessed thy good spirits; would that I were as tenacious of life, as *withy*, as quick to get over my hurts. I do not know what they mean who call the willow the emblem of despairing love.... It is rather the emblem of triumphant love and sympathy with all Nature. It may droop, it is so lithe, but it never weeps. The willow of Babylon blooms not less hopefully here.... It droops not to commemorate David’s tears, but rather to remind us how on the Euphrates once it snatched the crown from Alexander’s head.¹⁵⁹

It was with good spirits, then, that Thoreau bent his back to his surveying work. Beginning on July 7, 1859 he pored over Baldwin’s map in earnest, filling his journal with tables of measurements charting distances, falls, and the like.¹⁶⁰ He lists all of the bridges, and then corrects the names that Baldwin got wrong (so much for precision).¹⁶¹ Then, in early July, Thoreau traced the outlines of Baldwin’s river, which he transferred to his own map, for at some point in his investigation, he became disillusioned, not only with Baldwin’s map, but with the very superficiality of his own statistical work.¹⁶² What did a list of bridge characteristics have to say, anyway, mere facts and positions?

And so Thoreau improved the time: “I [am] reminded of the advantage of the poet, and philosopher, and naturalist, and whomsoever, of pursuing from time to time some other business than his chosen one,—seeing with the side of the eye. The poet will so get visions which no deliberate abandonment can secure. The philosopher is so forced to recognize principles which long study might not detect. And the naturalist even will stumble upon some new and unexpected flower or animal.”¹⁶³ “Improve” was one of Thoreau’s favorite verbs, but he meant something very different from the Improvers, or even Channing’s notion of internal development. “I hate the present modes of living and getting a living,” Thoreau had written in 1855, and for him “improvement” meant living, rather than getting a living.¹⁶⁴ It meant being present, aware of the birdsongs, the moonlight, the character of the breeze, being alive and sensitive to one’s surroundings.¹⁶⁵ It meant, in this case, making a map.

When Thoreau and friend Channing prepared to launch their boat, as Thoreau let his gaze play over the willow tree, they were setting out to create a map of the Concord River, a score that more adequately expressed the music accompanying his surveyor’s work: “Surveying seemed a noble employment which brought me within hearing of this bird.... Again, it is with the side of the ear that you hear. The music or the beauty belong not to your work itself but some of its accompaniments. You would fain devote yourself to the melody, but you will hear more of it if you devote yourself to your work.”¹⁶⁶ Taking his own advice, Thoreau, the lover of music, conducted his mapping work with gusto, and it shows.¹⁶⁷

At first glance, the map overwhelms: it’s a flood of information, including horizontal distance, vertical fall, the direction of the magnetic meridian, and a side view of the offending dam at Billerica, not to mention hundreds of tiny figures and notes.¹⁶⁸ But the outlines of the

river itself are familiar because they have been lifted directly from Baldwin's map. Here, however, the similarities to Baldwin's map end.

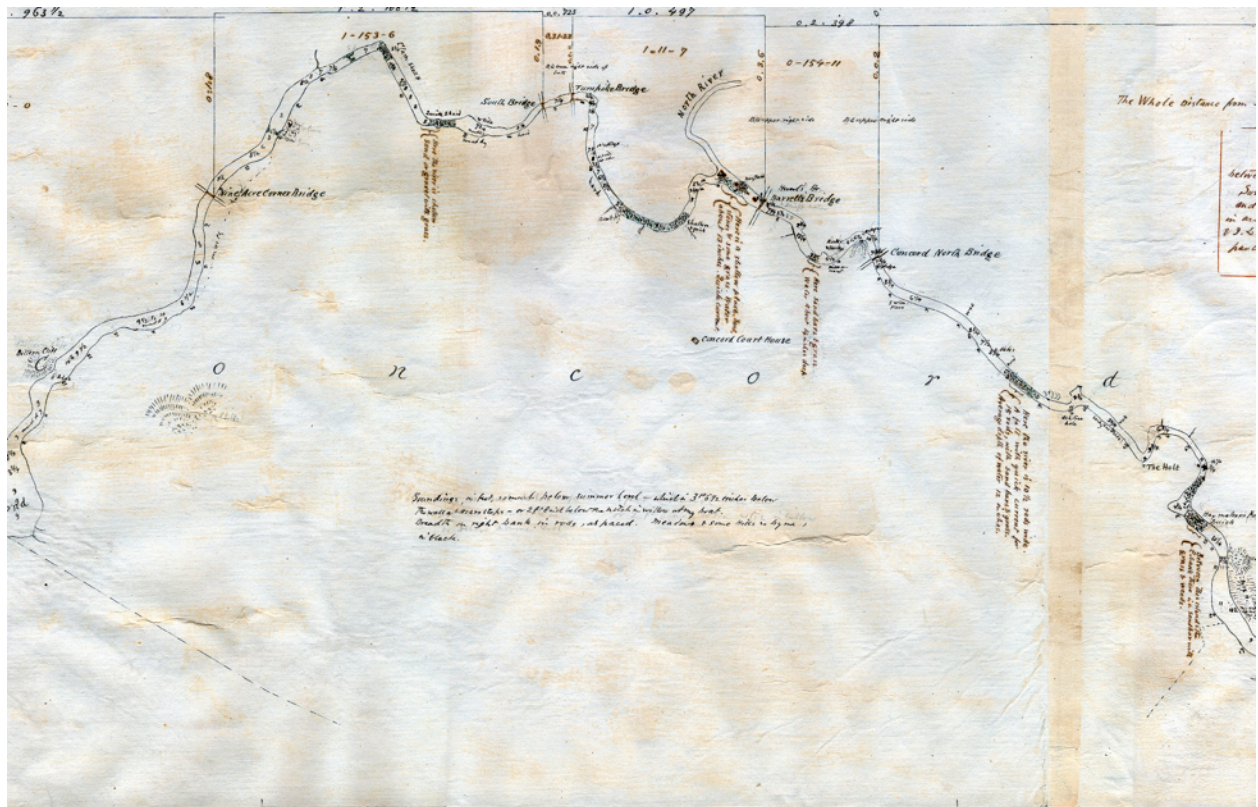


Figure 9: Detail of Thoreau, River Survey, 1859. Courtesy Concord Free Public Library.

Leaning in close enough to smell the map's age, we can again see the familiar square of the Court House, and the river, as in Baldwin's map. But we also get all sorts of additional information including particular comments about the current: "shallow and quick" in some places, "sandbars and grass," "soft banks," etc. And we get a sense of the river's human use: he notes, just downstream of the Turnpike bridge, "1st cottage," and just a little below, the "boat pl.," from where he and Channing began their explorations. Elsewhere he marks where the good swimming holes are. He points out the cultural and historical geography of the river: where an old hay bridge once stood, where one might find freshwater clams, the Monument to the battle of

Lexington and Concord in 1776. And he very carefully details what types of plants grow in and around the river: individual oak and ash trees, and river flora such as polygonum, bull rush, and many others.¹⁶⁹ We could interpret all of this as the ultra-scientific side of Thoreau, and indeed it is partly that: he seems to have measured the river compulsively. We could say that he is updating Baldwin by one-upping him, by more rigorously mapping the terrain. But I'm not sure that's the best interpretation.

"Interpretations on a Map" would be a good title for this bit of cartography, if it didn't already have two others: there's *Plan of Concord River from East Sudbury to Billerica Mills, 22.15 Miles, To be used on a trial in the S.J. Court, Sudbury and East Sudbury Meadow Corporation vs. Middlesex Canal, Taken by agreement of Parties by L. Baldwin, Civil Engineer. Surveyed & Drawn by B.F. Perham, May 1834*, the exact title of Baldwin's map. Notice the placement, off to the corner. In Baldwin's map, the title is front and center, printed in large letters, the first things to seize a viewer's attention. In Thoreau's map, however, it is labeled in a much more modestly-sized font, and seems to shyly peek out at the viewer, and in a seven-and-a-half foot map—which we tend to read from left to right—means that the title is among the last pieces of information we come to. Instead, in Thoreau's map, the river is the most noteworthy aspect, it is a narrative thread that we must follow, coming to the sum-it-all-up conclusion only at the end. But Thoreau also gives us a second, easily overlooked, even smaller title, this one in a box at the map's center: *Plan and Profile of that part of Concord River between Sudbury Causeway & the Canal Mill Dam in Billerica, Surveyed & the level taken in October 1811, and to be used in The Supreme Judicial Court, in an action then pending between D. Baldwin & J.L. Sullivan, pursuant to agreement of the parties. By L. Baldwin*. Apparently, Baldwin had mapped

the river in 1811 as well, for an earlier dispute over the river's height. But why would Thoreau choose to include both titles? Why not just the newer map? Or one of his own invention?

The answer lies in the river's statistics at the top of Thoreau's map, and again he has included both Baldwin's 1811 and 1834 measurements. They are dry, and easily ignored, but strange because they are not even close to agreement. In 1811, Baldwin was utterly confident that the river fell 4 feet 3.9 inches, while in 1834 he was convinced the fall was 2 feet 8 inches—about 60% off the earlier mark—making a mockery of the exactitude his maps claim for themselves. To be fair to Baldwin, his science was the victim of an attempt to protect the rising tide of capitalism, and before he could measure the river's in 1811, the owners of the dam threw open the floodgates, thus artificially inflating the river's fall, and, they hoped, obscuring the dam's upstream consequences.

This was public knowledge by the 1850s, but Thoreau refuses to let the point go, and he drives home the tenuous connection between map and terrain by including both the 1834 and 1811 statistics, creating a palimpsest of cartographic representations. By doing so he has exposed as a mere conceit the facade of naturalism that maps are intended to create.¹⁷⁰ Maps are not supposed to have histories, for history, it's popularly pronounced, is the study of change over time. But maps aren't supposed to change; they're supposed to remain timeless, decreeing, "this is the way the world actually is, right now." Change can only render maps obsolete. If, as Thoreau's has done, a map acknowledges that it is just one of many possible representations, all of which are flawed, then the scientific authority cartography claims for itself vanishes. What else might be mere convention, fabrication, fiction?¹⁷¹

Thoreau then goes on to critique the pretension to precision and uniformity itself. All across the top of Thoreau's map runs a horizontal line, meant to represent both the eye-level fall

and the vertical run of the river. Along this line, he includes both Baldwin's 1811 and 1834 sets of data, preserving the discrepancy between the two different representations. Then he measures the length of the river according to two different scales: miles, rods, links and miles, quarters, feet.

Finally, in what I have come to see as the coup de grace in an increasingly absurdist map, Thoreau gives us his scale for this sin against cartographic exactitude: "60 rods to the inch & B[aldwin]'s is $\frac{2}{3}$ of a division of my scale longer than Perham's." It's a joke, for how could one possibly navigate when even the inches, our most basic units of measurement, do not correspond to each other, and can only be defined relativistically? Whereas the author of Thoreau's surveying textbook was adamant that "surveying...comprises all the operations necessary for finding...the area or content of any portion of the surface of the earth...[and] the accurate delineation of the whole on paper," Thoreau shows just how tendentious such a pronouncement, in fact, was.¹⁷²

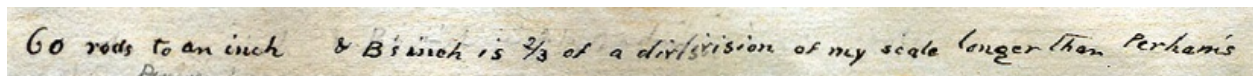


Figure 10: Detail of Thoreau, River Survey, 1859. Courtesy Concord Free Public Library.

It might be tempting to see the River Survey as an ironic anti-map, a snide rejection of disciplinary pretension, but irony is only one of the tropes that Thoreau draws on. Much more than a negative critique of standard cartography the River Survey is Thoreau's deeply earnest attempt to ground himself: all that information, all those piles of figures and ghosts of surveys past make Thoreau's a deep map.¹⁷³ If we look at the represented space through the eyes of the mapmaker, we see an impressively interconnected world of nature, commerce, culture, history, and imagination something that is not transferable that affirms the specificity of place, that could

never be confused for any other merely topographical feature.¹⁷⁴ It presupposes a full, contested landscape.¹⁷⁵ It is enchanting. And it deliberately calls into question the authority of any cartographic representation: whose map is more correct? Baldwin's of 1811? Or of 1834? Thoreau's?

Maybe the question is beside the point: representation is always tied up with what is being represented, and our actions cannot be divorced from what we observe. Maybe trusting to one's own intuition is the best way to chart a course.

In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quick-sands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not to make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds.¹⁷⁶

Baldwin and Thoreau's maps, then, couldn't be more different. Where Baldwin's is abstracted and shows empty, uninhabited space, Thoreau's is self-consciously subjective, situated in a landscape teeming with life and human usage. Where Baldwin's Concord River is anonymous and untouched, Thoreau's is a very particular river embedded in a very particular human and natural place. Where Baldwin's shows a fixed, reliable space that purports to be a perfect index of the real thing, Thoreau's highlights the assumptions, inaccuracies, blindspots, and outright errors in Baldwin's—and one assumes *all*—maps. One might use Baldwin's map to make definite claims about the Concord River, but how can one do the same with Thoreau's? One could look at Baldwin's map and say, "who cares about flooding this river? There's nothing there. There are neither winners nor losers." But someone looking at Thoreau's map would know that the character, the ecology, and the cultural usage of the river would surely be impacted by flood. In mapping contested ground, he has broken many of the rules that one finds in the surveying textbooks of the era, taking a discipline often understood as ultramodern, and bent its practice, changing the ultramodern into a sort of countermodern, repurposing surveying's

precepts to create a map whose notion of what is important about the Concord River is that it is a home to living things.

11.

“Mr. Thoreau

“If you are not engaged to-day I would like to make an excursion with you on the river. If you are, some other day next week.

“W.E.C.”¹⁷⁷

It had been a long summer, a good summer, and Thoreau was in the best of spirits when he and Channing rowed back to his boat place. Thoreau had been busily engaged, but he knew that any river trip is really just an excuse to spend long hours with a friend. He thought about this as he and Channing heaved his craft out of the current when the willow at water’s edge caught his eye, and he realized that something was missing from his map. So he bade his friend goodbye, rushed home, and unrolled his seven-foot canvas. Right in the very middle of it he wrote, “Soundings, in feet, so much below summer level—which is 3 ft. 6 1/2 inches below the wall at Hoar’s steps—or 2 ft. 8 inches below the notch in willow at my boat.”¹⁷⁸

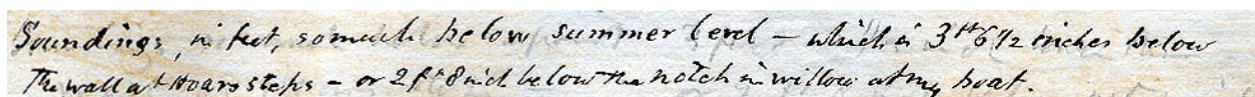


Figure 11: Detail of Thoreau, River Survey, 1859. Courtesy Concord Free Public Library.

12.

Boundaries, then, are not as fixed as they seem. Approached at a right angle, encountered perpendicular to one’s direction of travel, they are an abrupt end to one’s walk. But approached from the same direction as the line itself, approached along a parallel path, the boundary

suddenly becomes a route, not the end of a story but a thread through it, and the simple human act of walking becomes a method to poetically link spaces, thoughts, and subjectivities into a complex, meaningful tale.¹⁷⁹ Who has gone for an evening stroll along a boundary—a road, for instance, or the edge of a field, the neighborhood block, a beach, or a path through the woods—and not had their thoughts drift, perhaps from the scent of the lilacs over on the neighbor’s property and how it reminds them of their childhood home, far away in another time, to other cool evenings, and then to hopes or anxieties for the future? Who has not used a long walk to break a bout of writer’s block, or as an occasion for a heartfelt discussion, the act of connecting spaces somehow reinforcing the task of linking words and people? Looked at one way, the witness tree is absolutely an end, an impartial, authoritative arbiter of truth. But looked at with the side of the eye, it is an invitation to wander, to blend, to see similarity in difference. “It is remarkable how the river, even from its very source to its mouth, runs with great bends or zigzags regularly recurring and including many smaller ones, first northerly, then northeasterly, growing more and more simple and direct as it descends, like a tree.”¹⁸⁰ Creeping up to the edge of a boundary, looking over it to the other side, one can find what one should not: connection. With their self-evident arbitrariness—is there any real reason land needs to be measured in squares?—boundaries invite their own transgression, allowing once distinct entities to shade into each other, and meanings to come unfixed and fluid. Trees and rivers somehow find themselves second cousins to each other, their shapes betraying a familial resemblance. And though the connection may be a little more distant, both trees and rivers seem somehow related to us. We hear rivers speak, and model our own language according to aquatic metaphors: writing should flow, vowels sound liquid, narratives can eddy backwards in time.¹⁸¹ Darwin writes of an only partially secularized Tree of Life—“which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the

earth, and covers the surface with its ever branching and beautiful ramifications”—a metaphor strongly inclining towards sympathy and mutual aid rather than the competition of all against all.¹⁸² Books are filled with leaves, and indeed sometimes bound in bark.

“The tree is full of poetry,” wrote Thoreau in 1852.¹⁸³

And again: “‘Evergreens’ would be a good title for some of my things.”¹⁸⁴

Rivers are boundaries, too, perhaps even more naturally so than trees, as any state or national map will show. But they are just as often avenues for discovery and adventure. “The river is my highway,” Thoreau wrote in 1852, “the only wild and unfenced part of the world hereabouts.”¹⁸⁵ Yet, the river was more than just a way for Thoreau to get somewhere: it was a living ally.

Too often, during his terrestrial rambles, Thoreau would have to interrupt his walking and his thinking when abruptly he came to a fence, and he fumed about them, dreaming of “A people who would begin by burning the fences and let the forest stand.”¹⁸⁶ I am sure that part of what enticed Thoreau about the Concord was its untamable wildness—mills and holding ponds be damned—its active resistance to being hemmed in, its blithe willingness to help him realize his dreams, its readiness to throw the way open for its life-long companion. Its yearly spring flood washed away fences, carried them downstream on its current until Thoreau, afloat in his rowboat, plucked the rails out of the deluge, took them home, and split them for kindling. *Concord* means harmony.

In the end, even fences conspire against the desire to hold the line, the smug arrogance, which drives a few posts and declares triumph over nature, has always, is always disappointed. The willow, in the end, will triumph. “For years a willow might not have chanced to take root in the open meadow, but run a barrier like [a fence] straight through it, and in a short time it will be

lined with them; for it both collects the seeds and defends the plants against man himself, as well as other foes.”¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, boundaries are necessary. They give us meaning. There is a danger in arguing that no boundaries exist, that everything is the same, the same danger that commoditization presents: homogeneity. Place is only powerful because it is not interchangeable, not exchangeable for any other blank space on the map. But to fetishize place, as so often happens in the wider world of environmentalism, can also be a trap, for place can all too easily call up images of blood and fatherland, the sort of environmental rhetoric that has been so effectively used, *is* being so effectively used as I write these words, to purge landscapes of people arbitrarily deemed unfit. Think of the nativist bombast—the rhetoric of bigotry is universal, and the nation matters little—spouted by those who call for excluding any unwanted group from territory that is supposedly in danger of being overrun, and the appeal to place usually comes right at the forefront. All places are not good places, all place-making not equally valuable.

We have little choice but to draw boundaries, and this, I think, is where Henry David Thoreau, Surveyor still has something to say to us moderns. “*Who* are we? *where* are we,” an overwhelmed Thoreau wrote as he struggled to find the words fitting his experience on Maine’s Mt. Katahdin.¹⁸⁸ I don’t think he ever found an answer to those two questions, and I’m pretty sure that he never really wanted to. He knew that in an important way who we are depends on where we are, and that where we are depends on what relationships we choose to honor. We can imagine ourselves completely out of the picture, and draw landscapes whose only important character is the market, and call these natural. But for Thoreau the surveyor, the best places were those that were always in the process of becoming, the best societies were always awakening to a

new dawn, everyday rediscovering, renegotiating, reconnecting with their place in the ever-shifting world.¹⁸⁹ The best boundaries were not the ones that securely walled off one thing from another—art from science, history from literature, politics from land, people from economies, town from woods, country from city, rich from poor, nature from culture—but the ones that invited transgression.

Though it is fairly common to dismiss Thoreau's surveying as a day job, something he merely tolerated, I think such dismissal misses the point. After all, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, *Walden*, *Cape Cod*, *The Maine Woods*, "Walking," and his journals are filled with spatial insights, the poetry of looking closely at the land.¹⁹⁰ The great power in Thoreau's surveying is that he brought to his discipline a sense of wonder that no textbook could squash.¹⁹¹ His surveying, like his natural historicizing, led him to look closely at the world, to provide fruit for his imagination's appetite, to see possibility where others saw only soul-killing repetition, and to ask the inconvenient question, "Is the earth improving or deteriorating.... Does it require to be improved by the hands of man, or is man to live more naturally and so more safely?"¹⁹² He saw that the trend of an industrializing US, one in which the culture of capitalism was growing stronger everyday, one in which the natural world was merely a resource for industry to plunder or something to be overcome, that this sort of Progress comes at the unacceptable cost of erasing individuality, expunging particularity in favor of a bland predictability. It was a loss of poetry.¹⁹³ "I should like to ask the assessors what is the value of that blue mountain range in the northwest horizon to Concord, and see if they would laugh or seriously set about calculating it. How poor, comparatively, should we be without it.... If I were one of the fathers of the town I would not sell this right which we now enjoy for all the merely material wealth and prosperity conceivable. If need were, we would rather all go down together."¹⁹⁴

“So many autumn, ay, and winter days, spent outside the town, trying to hear what was in the wind, to hear and carry it express,” wrote Thoreau in *Walden*.¹⁹⁵ I think this is what Thoreau heard when he listened carefully to the breeze sliding over the willow’s strings as he prepared for a surveying trip down the Concord: snatches of a tune poised in counterpoint to the dissonant rumbling of the carts on their way to market and the low grinding of mill wheels on the river’s banks, clearer than the muddy prayers of the agricultural improvers trying desperately to wring increased profits from their land—descending phrases of capitalism’s ultimate poverty, all—there arose sounds more vivid, more soul-stirring. There is no reason any of us must live in a world of violence, commoditized into blandness; no reason any of us must forfeit our creativity, our peculiar genius, our health, our lives in order to get a living.

“We boast that we belong to the Nineteenth Century,” Thoreau had written in 1853, “and are making the most rapid strides of any nation. But consider how little the village does for its own culture.... If we live in the Nineteenth Century, why should we not enjoy the advantages which the Nineteenth Century has to offer? Why should our life be in any respect provincial?”¹⁹⁶ Instead of looking at his compass and finding the path to private property, he used it to right an historical error—“They who laid out the town should have made the river available as a common possession forever”—to stake a claim for the bull rush and the ash tree, for the bathers and those who hunted for freshwater clams, for himself and for all Concordians.¹⁹⁷ He used his compass to pinpoint the deep interconnections between nature and culture, the promise of his nineteenth century. He used his mapping to protest privatization, to disavow the cheap utopian assurances of individual gain so dearly bought. “I find that I have a civil right in the River,” Thoreau had written in 1853, and in 1859 he used his skill as a surveyor to plat those claims on a map.¹⁹⁸

The river and the witness tree. Rootedness and constant movement. Nature and culture. On the surface they seem like perfect contradictions, the lines strictly fenced. But Thoreau, a scholar of boundary making, knew otherwise. Here's my favorite Thoreau, the mischievous surveyor whose language bears witness to a love of measurement, but whose genius was to let things come indefinably alive: East slides into West, sunset into sunrise, home into travel, past and present into future, city into country, shrub oaks into people. Here it comes whispering in, a faint breath animating dry leaves:

We had a remarkable sunset one day last November. I was walking in a meadow, the source of a small brook, when the sun at last, just before setting, after a cold gray day, reached a clear stratum in the horizon, and the softest, brightest morning sunlight fell on the dry grass and on the stems of the trees in the opposite horizon, and on the leaves of the shrub-oaks on the hill-side, while our shadows stretched long over the meadow eastward, as if we were the only motes in its beams...When we reflected that this was not a solitary phenomenon, never to happen again, but that it would happen forever and ever an infinite number of evenings, and cheer and reassure the latest child that walked there, it was more glorious still.

The sun sets on some retired meadows, where no house is visible, with all the glory and splendor that it lavishes on cities, and, perchance, as it has never set before...and there is some little black-veined brook in the midst of the marsh, just beginning to meander, winding slowly around a decaying stump. We walked in so pure and bright a light, gilding the withered grass and leaves, so softly and serenely bright, I thought I had never bathed in such a golden flood, without a ripple or murmur to it. The west side of every wood and rising ground gleamed like the boundary of Elysium, and the sun on our backs seemed like a gentle herdsman driving us home at evening.

So we saunter towards the Holy Land, till one day the sun shall shine more brightly than ever he has done, shall perchance shine into our minds and hearts, and light up our whole lives with a great awakening light, as warm and serene and golden as on a bank-side in autumn.¹⁹⁹

PART TWO

The Forested Landscape of Hope: At Home in the Great Northern Wilderness

Away from the sounds of roads and the glare of carbon arc street-lights, it is quiet here. Some would say it is peaceful, but that is not the right word. This land throbs with life in every season and at every hour. And the quiet itself is not truly quiet. In the absence of the noise of jets and air conditioners, internal combustion engines and recorded music that blanket our perceptions in most of the human environments of America, ten thousand subtler voices may be heard.

-Joseph Bruchac, 2002.¹

1.

If there is a Holy Land, it smells like balsam fir, surely.

The sun's action on dead and drying needles releases a calming balm to soothe the soul, at once wild and deeply familiar (if it's been a while since you've been to the woods, balsam is the smell that outdoorsy companies like L.L. Bean or the Nature Company sew into little decorative scented pillows—a bit of the wild packaged and for sale at your local mall).² Balsam historically covered 28% of northern New York State's Adirondack Mountains, and, along with red spruce and the occasional spindly white or yellow birch, make up pretty much the entire forest cover of the highlands above 2500 feet.³

This is a story of one balsamic Holy Land.

Thoreau never sauntered his way from Concord north-west to the Adirondacks, his internal needle dipped further south, but Emerson did, in 1858, along with the scientist Louis Agassiz, the artist W.J. Stillman, the poet James Russell Lowell, and a handful of other writers, scientists, philosophers, and Adirondack guides—"Ten men, ten guides, our company all told," he wrote in his poetic reflection, "The Adirondacs" (1858).⁴ Thoreau was in a huff, disappointed, I think, that he had been left out: "Emerson says that he and Agassiz and Company broke some dozens of ale-bottles, one after another, with their bullets, in the Adirondack country, using them for marks. It sounds rather Cockneyish," he sniffed, as if he had been glad to miss such *déclassé* gregariousness.⁵ But I think he would have loved the wild. Emerson certainly did.

When Emerson and company travelled to Follansbee Pond, amongst the most out-of-the-way spots in the Adirondacks, it was to recreate themselves and upon arrival, they straight away set out to make themselves at home. Yet, strangely enough, the pond's shores were already well

accustomed to the tread of Anglo-American footsteps: indeed, for a number of years the pond been home to a “primitive philosopher and hermit,” who was, so the rumor ran, also an English nobleman. He was the Follansbee—or Follingsby, or Follensby; no one was ever quite sure—whose name graced the pond, whose misanthropy has become the stuff of Adirondack legend, and who is supposedly buried somewhere nearby.⁶ From the forest’s shadows, perhaps, Follansbee’s ghost peeped out as Emerson and company hewed what would come to be known as “Philosopher’s Camp.”

On the east a bay makes inward to the land
Between two rocky arms, we climb the bank,
And in the twilight of the forest noon
Wield the first axe these echoes ever heard.
We cut young tree to make our poles and thwarts,
Barked the white spruce to weatherfend the roof,
Then struck a light, and kindled the campfire.

Beneath their “patron pine...fifteen feet in girth,” and his partner, a maple eight feet thick, the campers fished, drank beer and shot the empty bottles, argued, fought—to no avail—hordes of mosquitoes and blackflies, climbed the surrounding peaks, got muddy and scratched by thorns, undoubtedly wound up with a blister or two, philosophized, painted, wrote, and dissected fish.⁷



Figure 12: William James Stillman, *The Philosopher's Camp*, 1858. Concord Free Public Library.

But very quickly, Emerson's poetic tale of wilderness adventure takes on suggestive, tangential overtones, a midsummer night's dream of topsy-turvy impressions, a blending and slipping of categories that would have made a pouting Thoreau smile.

It begins with a speaking tree: "'Welcome!' the wood god murmured through the leaves,— 'Welcome, though late, unknowing, yet known to me.'"⁸

They are words that work a transformation in Emerson and his friends, whose bodies seem to remember what they have never known: the downy, perfumed joy of lying on mattresses made up of hemlock and balsam boughs; the clear-eyed sharp-focus of eyes chiseled open by the dawn's cold; a shedding of cares, obligations, and social commitments that felt, for all the world, like being a child once again. As a child, Emerson, the erstwhile scholar, beheld the guides with something like idealized respect and adulation, a striking swapping of social prestige: "Your rank is all reversed: let men of cloth/Bow to the stalwart churls in overalls:/*They* are the doctors of the wilderness,/And we the low-prized laymen." These doctors, stripped in attire down to the barest

essentials of shoes, flannel shirt, and trousers—eschewing even a hat—these doctors’ bodies spoke of the rugged strength of the surrounding land, of the hardness and endurance necessary to live their lives in the wilderness: “In winter, lumberers; in summer, guides;/Their sinewy arms pull at the oar untired/Three times ten thousand strokes, from morn to/eve.”

Adolescent, innocent pride follows—“We seemed dwellers of the zodiac.... We trode on air, contemned the distant town”—and quickly develops into a classically Emersonian celebration of the Nature-inspired single individual, a Nature who seductively spoke “To each apart, lifting her lovely shows/To spiritual lessons pointed home.” It’s a transformative moment: the urban, scholarly sports, trimmed back and regrown in the salubrious climate of divine revelation, their moment of maturation marked supernaturally by a changing sky—“The clouds are rich and dark, the air serene,/So like the soul of me, what if ‘t were me,”—nature and human culture begin to collapse into each other, and only at the last moment is there an abrupt face-to-face recognition of difference:

Two of our mates returning with swift oars.
One held a printed journal waving high
Caught from a late-arriving traveller,
Big with great news, and shouted the report
For which the world had waited, now firm fact,
Of the wire-cable laid beneath the sea,
And landed on our coast, and pulsating
With ductile fire....
A burst of joy, as if we told the fact....
Wake, echoing caves!
Bend near, faint day-moon! Yon thundertops,
Let them hear well! ‘tis theirs as much as ours.

Here, on a wilderness lake, the news of the transatlantic cable’s completion made waves that buoyed Emerson’s soul. “The lightning has run masterless too long;/He must to school, and learn his verb and noun,” sung the poet, now in full-throated celebration of unity. “We flee away from cities, but we bring/The best of cities with us.... We praise the guide, we praise the forest

life;/But will we sacrifice our dear-bought lore/Of books and arts and trained experiment,/Or count the Sioux a match for Agassiz?" The answer came back from the woods itself: "witness the mute all-hail/The joyous traveler gives, when on the verge/Of craggy Indian wilderness he hears/From a log-cabin stream Beethoven's notes/On the piano, played with master's hand."⁹ It's a poem filled with a typically Emersonian triumphalism, the kind that celebrates the synthesis of raw woods, individual genius, and technological progress, all of it rolled together and sung by the poet, that person representing the ideal mixture of disciplinary rigor and inspired wildness. It's also, I think, characterized by a typically Emersonian resistance to easy interpretation.

One way to read the poem is that the Transcendentalist, a citified sport come to the woods for a brief bit of adventure, was uncomfortable with all the wildness of the wilderness, who could only make do by turning keen reality into an idealized poem, and then blunting its edge by grinding the imagined world against such coarse interlopers as technology and art. It's the familiar dismissal of Transcendentalists as not committed enough to real, true wilderness.¹⁰ Another is to point out Emerson's over-idealization of the guides, who were, in reality, exploited laborers—or canny locals capitalizing on elite fantasies, depending on one's vantage point.¹¹ Yet another is to see Emerson's poem not as a refusal to face the real world, but as an entirely coherent expression of his particular brand of Transcendentalism: in a transitive relationship where technology is created by humans who are themselves a product of Nature, there is nothing at all strange in seeing a telegraph or Beethoven symphony natural equivalents of lightning and craggy Indian wilderness.¹²

But what is most striking to me about Emerson's poem is how full of people, noise, world events, and music the wilderness surrounding Follansbee Pond was.

2.



Figure 13: Thomas Cole, *Schroon Mountain*, 1838. Courtesy Cleveland Museum of Art.

“I do not often speak to public questions,” Emerson had written in 1854. “They are odious and hurtful.” He was a poet and a scholar and preferred to be left to follow his muse, writing for a select few intellectuals and students; but the decade of the 1850s, wrung in when the great Whig compromiser Henry Clay steered through Congress the Compromise of 1850, and with it a strengthened Fugitive Slave Law—a law which would make it a crime for any Northerner to knowingly aid an escaped slave, a law which could be interpreted to virtually outlaw abolitionism—this was a decade when even scholars had to take a public stand. “I have lived all my life without suffering any known inconvenience from American Slavery,” Emerson continued, “until the other day,” when his antislavery sympathies became illegal.¹³ By the mid 1850s, Emerson was increasingly and openly advocating civil disobedience, demanding that any American with a shred of conscience must break the law, and when John Brown came to

Concord in 1857 and again in 1859, months before his Harper's Ferry Raid, he and Emerson spent long hours together, talking politics. When Brown was finally caught, tried, and executed, Emerson was one of the few who rallied to his defense: Brown "will make the gallows as glorious as the cross," said the Sage of Concord.¹⁴

So when Emerson set foot in the Adirondacks in 1858, I have to wonder: was he hoping to run in to Brown? After all, Brown had a house not far from Follansbee Pond, had moved his family to the town of North Elba in 1849, attracted by the remoteness and a remarkable social experiment, begun in 1846 when the first African American settlers of Essex and Franklin Counties—in the heart of what we now think of as the Adirondack High Peaks region—stepped onto their land for first time, sniffed the air, maybe tasted the soil hoping to discover it sweet, looked around at the tangle of woods, and tried to imagine clearing the land, building a house, sinking down roots and raising up a family.¹⁵ Maybe he was hoping to run into the settlers themselves, for these black pioneers had left cities and town throughout New York to make a home.¹⁶ Whatever Emerson's plans might have been, the pioneers were there, the vanguard of a peaceful revolution meant to germinate in the stony, acidic Adirondack soils, rooted in the free mountains down from which a clean, clear, balsamic breeze would sweep over the nation, healing the carcinomata disfiguring the U.S.¹⁷

When they arrived, the pioneers refused to settle as good individual capitalists ought to, each to his own private plot (Keep out! No Trespassing! Violators Will Be Prosecuted!), and instead gathered socially, emphasizing spatially what they sought to do politically.¹⁸ It's hard to tell from the archival sources that remain, but it seems that they congregated in a few main nodes; perhaps the biggest was around North Elba and may have been known as Timbuctoo, an echo of ancient Malian empire's capitol, a powerful center of civilization when life in much of

Europe was nasty, brutish and short.¹⁹ A little farther north was Blacksville. And somewhere just to the west was Freeman's Home. Settling socially earned them the enmity of some local whites, who feared that their territory was being overrun, but not every white face formed itself into a sneer.²⁰ Indeed, in North Elba, the Thompson and Osgood families—two of the oldest families in the area—helped the settlers greatly and were probably integrated into the pioneers' social, economic, and cultural lives. And so the American Timbuctoo—in whatever form it actually existed—along with Blacksville and Freeman's Home and all the other small little holdings whose names we've lost, all of this was a heady hybrid of white and black, African and American, a realization of the subjunctive possibilities of racial harmony, a utopian abolitionist geography that was not nowhere, but rooted in a real somewhere, a place reachable by boat and road and trail, a place in the Great Northern Wilderness of the Adirondacks.²¹

3.

I first learned of Timbuctoo and Smith's Adirondack experiment when, as a college sophomore, I stumbled into Russell Banks's *Cloudsplitter* (1999), a novel about John Brown. The Adirondack parts, set at Brown's last home and final resting place in North Elba, are still some of the best things written about the Smith grant, despite—or because of—the way Banks takes the past in hand, working the branching chaos into a sleek and watertight bark for exploring history's shoals and eddies. Timbuctoo and the black pioneers have been mostly forgotten, and when they have been hauled from the deep into the daylight, most historians treat the whole venture as a strange anomaly in abolitionist history, a footnoted curiosity that gives a moment of respite along the path from William Lloyd Garrison's peaceful non-resistance to Brown's bloodshed. Or the venture is treated as sheer, obvious folly, racial folly: "As a matter of

fact,” wrote the first historian of the Adirondacks, Alfred Donaldson, in 1921, “the attempt to combine an escaped slave with a so-called Adirondack farm was about as promising of agricultural results as would be the placing of an Italian lizard on a Norwegian iceberg.”²²

Thankfully, the racist drivel has faded from the page of recent work, but it’s the strangeness of the past that is missing yet, and it’s that strangeness that Banks delights in. Indeed, it’s what initially spurred my interest: the Adirondacks are still wild, and they were even more so in 1846. In 1809 Archibald McIntyre set up his first iron mining operation in the mountains surrounding North Elba, but it folded in 1815, and by 1840, there were only six families inhabiting the immediate area.²³

The strangeness of Timbuctoo has always revolved around the fact that the place was difficult to get to for geologists and fishermen, even more so for a family, and it’s hard to see how anyone would think that such an out-of-the-way place would wind up at the heart of the fight against slavery and racism.

Today, the Adirondacks are one of the most popular tourist destinations in the East, but almost no one has ever heard of the black pioneers; and so, we’re here in a virtually uncharted historical wilderness, where strange things abound. Like this: unicorns lived in the Adirondacks. When New York was the New Netherlands, when Dutch Patroons traded with the region’s Indians for their furred, Adirondack wealth, they refused to set foot in the northern mountains for fear of the horned beasts.

Here’s another: the Hudson River, one of the nation’s main thoroughfares, a river whose water has floated billions of dollars up and down New York State from Albany to New York City, the same river that Henry Hudson tried to sail up, all the way to its source, this river came, apparently, from nowhere. By 1825 the Hudson’s waters had been turned into Clinton’s Ditch,

the Erie Canal, one of the foremost engineering marvels of its time, but still, no one knew where the water originated. It wasn't until 1837 that a source for the Hudson was found. Sort of. Only in the 1870s, when surveyor Verplanck Colvin followed a small stream uphill—a stream small enough that you can step over it—until it seeped out of the western end of a small lake, was the source of the Hudson pinpointed. It is over 4,000 feet above Manhattan, and Colvin called it Lake Tear of the Clouds.²⁴

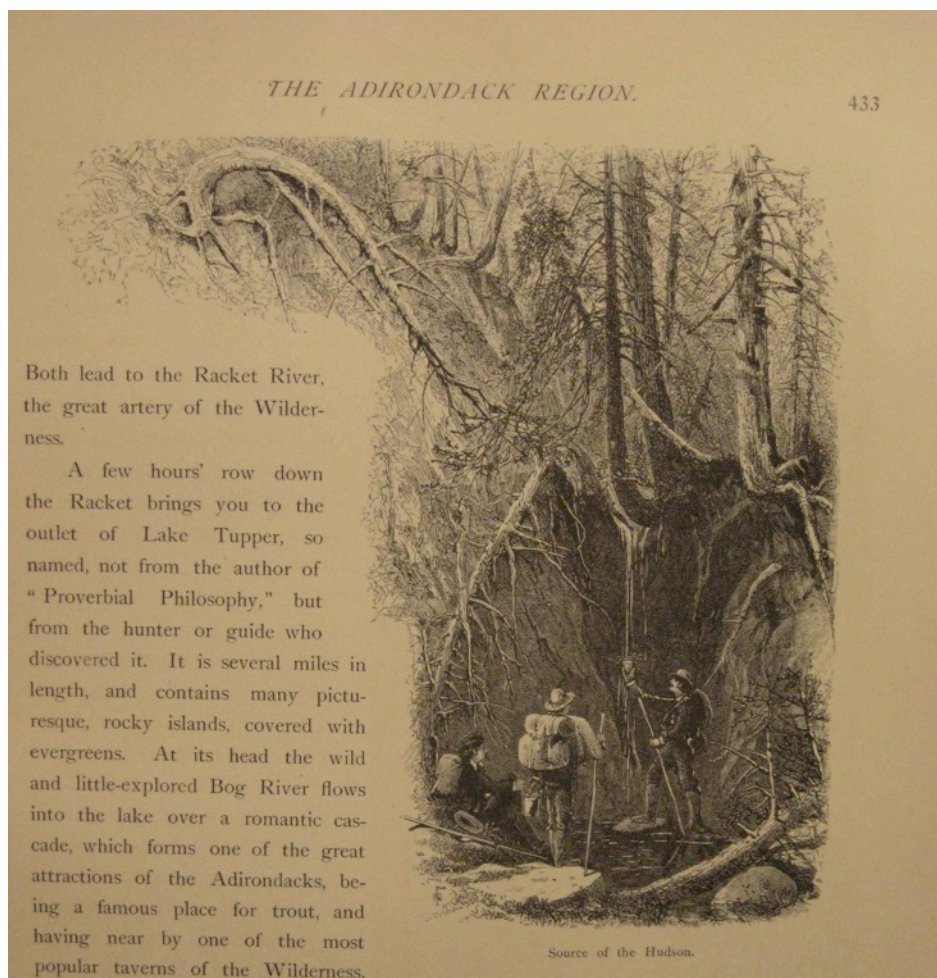


Figure 14: Harry Fenn, “Source of the Hudson,” in *Picturesque America*, 1872.²⁵

Stranger yet: it's not entirely clear where the Adirondacks are, or even what they are. They've been something of a fantastic geography for the entirety of their American existence. Though they have a birth date, February 20, 1838, the date that geologist Ebenezer Emmons christened a mountain range "in the neighborhood of the Upper Hudson and Ausable River" from the High Peak of Essex's pulpit—a peak we today know as Mt. Marcy—it was hard to tell where Adirondack ended and something else began.²⁶ When Emmons came to the mountains that we know today as the Adirondacks, he saw range upon range, all of them different: the Black or Tongue Mountains, the Kayadarosseras, the West Moriah, and the Clinton. This last group, named for the governor of New York, could also be called Adirondack, Emmons wrote, but he never settled on one particular name, partly, I think, because it's not clear that "Adirondack" means anything at all.²⁷ Emmons wanted to name the region for a "well known tribe of Indians who once hunted here."

It appears that the Adirondacks or Algonquins in early times held all the country North of the Mohawk, West of Champlain, South of Lower Canada, and East of the Saint Lawrence as their beaver hunting grounds, but were finally expelled by superior force of the Agoneseah, or Five Nations. Whether this is literally true or not, it is well known that the Adirondacks resided in and occupied a northern section of the State and undoubtedly used a portion at least of the territory thus counted as beaver hunting grounds.²⁸

But the prose is at war with itself, uncertainty stalking confidence. Indeed, "Adirondack," as far as has been determined, is not an Algonquin word: it's a Mohawk one, *atirú:taks*, and it's an insult meaning "the eaters of trees," an epithet making fun of one's poverty, as in "you're so poor you need to eat tree bark," that the Mohawk likely hurled at their fur trade adversaries, which may have included various bands of lower Ottawa River Algonquins and Montagnis—but no one is really sure.²⁹ It appears that no Indians ever referred to themselves as Adirondacks; it also appears that no Indians permanently lived in the Adirondacks, though the land was not

unclaimed, and early visitors reported trails worn a foot deep by generations of Native feet.³⁰ However, once the Dutch, spooked by rogue unicorns, caught wind of the fantastic tribe, they penned the name into the written, historical record, and it has stuck, ever since.³¹

Throughout the nineteenth century, the mountain ranges huddled together in a tight scrum, until Adirondack came to represent all the peaks, and then slowly the name tumbled downhill, following the infant Hudson, to the surrounding woods and lakes, an area generally known throughout the nineteenth century as the Great Northern Wilderness, or marked on maps as simply Wild Unsettled Country, a riotous tangle of unknowable land.³²

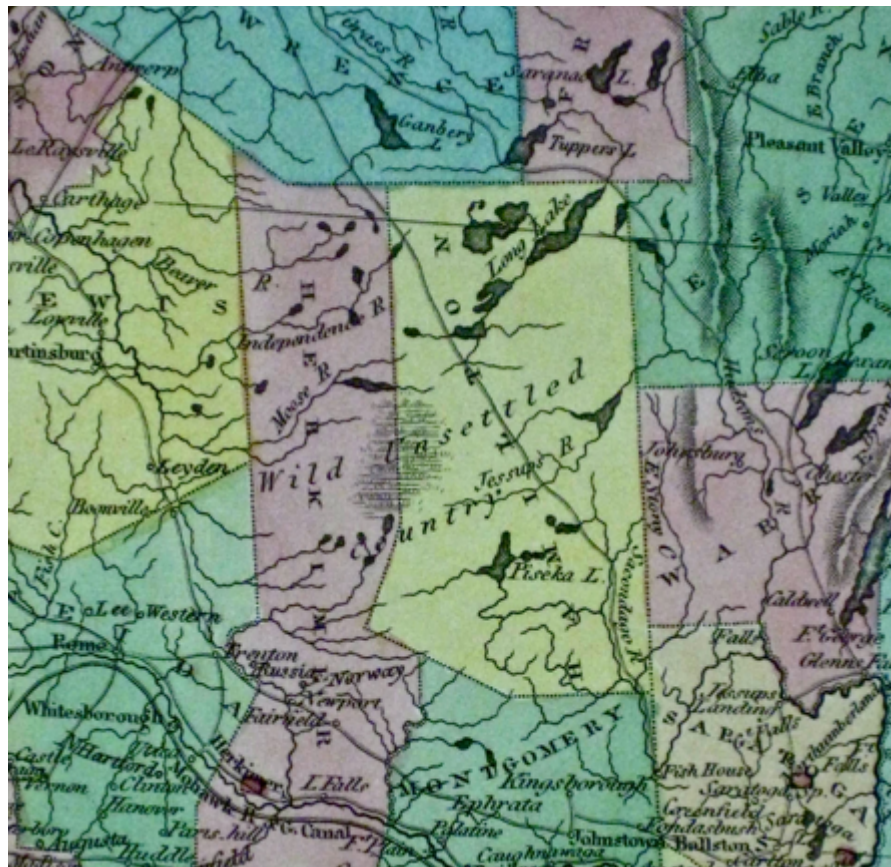


Figure 15: Detail from H.C. Carey, “Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Map of New York,” 1823. Courtesy Adirondack Museum.³³

In 1870, Homer D.L. Sweet published an epic poem of 7,777 lines, called *Twilight Hours in the Adirondacks: The Daily Doings and Several Sayings of Seven Sober, Social, Scientific Students in the Great Wilderness of Northern New York*, and though he takes seven precise stabs at trying to pinpoint where, exactly, the wilderness is, in the end he arrives at mystery:

The rivers that rise in this region, and flow to all points of the compass,
Are numerous, lengthy, and large, interlocked in their tiniest sources,
Like branches of trees intertwined, labyrinthian-like in their mazes,
That vex the Chorographer much, in his efforts to trace them distinctly.³⁴

It wasn't until 1892, when the State created the Adirondack Park and threw a blue boundary line around 2.8 million acres of land, that the Adirondacks became a discrete, definable place. But even this definition refused to stay put: in 1912, the Park was enlarged, land that was formerly other becoming officially Adirondack. This happened again in 1972. Add to this that of the Adirondack Park's more than six million acres—by far the largest nature reserve in the U.S. (it's larger than the entire state of Massachusetts)—only 38% or so is actually owned by the State; the rest is private land, and you'll find on it ski resorts, logging companies, amusement parks, car dealerships, corporate franchises, Olympic training complexes (the 1980 winter Olympics were held in Lake Placid, and you can see the ski jump from John Brown's farmhouse), small businesses, and homes. Indeed, Emerson's Follensby Pond is still privately owned.³⁵

Adirondack geography beguiles, and one must take care lest the “wood madness” take over. W.J. Stillman, fifteen years or more before he led Emerson and Agassiz to Philosopher's Camp, almost succumbed: “In the twinkling of an eye, the entire landscape seemed to have changed its bearing.... Then began to come over me, like an evil spell, the bewilderment and the panic which accompanied it.... I had one terrible moment of clear consciousness, that if I went astray at this juncture, no human being would ever know where I was.”³⁶ Perhaps he had strayed

into an alternate landscape, an alternate history: before they were the Adirondacks, the territory was known by some as Castorland, a vast estate dreamed up in the late-eighteenth-century by a *fin de siècle* French nobleman who had grown tired of the Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité of the French Revolution and wanted to turn the mountains into a retreat for France's endangered aristocracy. He planned on planting two cities of fourteen thousand town lots each in the wilderness. The plan faltered, but not until 1814, and even after Castorland's demise some of the land did end up in the hands of a French aristocrat when Napoleon's brother made his summer home in Adirondack woods.³⁷

What is remarkable to me is that there is absolutely nothing strange about the strangeness of Castorland: it's fantastic, but will-o'-the-wisps abound in the Great Northern Wilderness. Indeed, two years before John Brown, Abolitionist was born, another John Brown, who had made no small part of his fortune by shipping slaves from Africa to the U.S., stalked the region's woods, dreaming of an Adirondack empire. He drew up plans for eight townships, Industry, Enterprise, Perseverance, Unanimity, Frugality, Sobriety, Economy, and Regularity, all set out rationally on a Jeffersonian grid, and built roads and sawmills and a few houses, and then, in 1803, died, leaving his name on the landscape—one can still find occasional contemporary references to John Brown's Tract—and on a university in Rhode Island.³⁸

So here we are, in the midst of a deep landscape with a tangled past, a Great Northern Wilderness of mines and small homesteads and latifundia; a park and a retreat from anti-aristocratic Revolution; a place named for a white idea of Nativeness, a French idea of America, and an African American idea of ethnic pride; a place settled by squatters, and slaveholders who dreamed of towns named Unanimity, and revolutionaries plotting to cleanse the slaveholders'

stained deeds with blood, and black farmers, some of them escaped slaves themselves, seeking in the Great Northern Wilderness an ecology of freedom.³⁹

4.

1846 was a year of hope and activism for New York's abolitionists, as well as, paradoxically, a year of utter disappointment. The voters of New York State, having emancipated their adult slaves in 1827, voted down efforts to make good on their down payment and enfranchise African American men: unless an individual could prove that he was worth at least \$250, the doors of the polls would remain closed to him. By the mid-1840s, abolitionist efforts were gaining steam, picking up support in mainstream circles, and among those who felt that black inequality was a blotch on the nation's promise was Gerrit Smith, a man whose past and future was tied to New York's northern mountains, though he never set foot in the region. Gerrit was the wealthy scion of the merchant Peter, a one-time partner of John Jacob Astor, whose fortune, which would eventually include hundreds of thousand of acres of land in New York State, was premised on the Adirondack fur trade: every summer, Smith and Astor would travel west along the Mohawk River into the state's interior, until they met with bands of Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, and Seneca Indians who had spent the winter trapping beaver in the Great Northern Wilderness, beaver whose skins would grace the heads of the western world's most refined, urbane elite. In his old age, the elder Smith transferred his kingdom to his son—nearly \$400,000 in addition to almost a million acres of real estate. But Gerrit's soul was never in business, and it was on his inherited land, 120,000 acres of it, that the black pioneers settled.⁴⁰

Gerrit Smith was a come-outer—a particular brand of antebellum individualist who “came out” of mainstream religion, politics, education, culture, fashion, social mores, and indeed nearly anything deemed traditional—who threw in his lot with the full range of nineteenth-century reform movements. It’s fair to call him a religious fundamentalist, but his fundamentalism was fundamentally different from what we in the early twenty-first century might think when we hear that word. Rather than upholding a narrow, socially regressive, authoritarian reading of the Bible, Smith—along with a number of other radical Garrisonian abolitionists—was trying to bring God’s government to earth, and the key tenet of their religious thinking was that human domination was a basic sin, God the one true governor, the only authority to which a person should ever submit.⁴¹ Any other hierarchy—black over white, man over woman, rich over poor—was a sort of false idolatry, and anyone who preached it a false prophet. Humans must not be reduced to mere things, and God’s government meant a society of free women and men, each equal in terms of their social relations, who could devote themselves perfectly and harmoniously to following the higher law, as well as the nation’s founding principles.⁴² To this religious and moral root of abolitionism, Smith added a political one. He would not, like Garrison in 1854 burn the Constitution or indict the U.S. as corrupted even down to its very genetic code, but indeed argued that slavery was an untenable condition according to the nation’s own legal tradition, and ought to be abolished “not because political economy, national prosperity, or any kindred considerations demand its abolition; but because it is demanded by the principle that ‘all men are created equal,’ and that no man is to be excluded from the rights of manhood.”⁴³

And so Smith’s antislavery commitments were complicated. He was fascinated by Garrison’s anarchistic call for a “Universal Emancipation,” one that would free us all from

hierarchy by breaking the shackles binding us to the corruption of government, and Smith would consistently emphasize the duty of every individual to square himself with an enlightened divine law. But he was turned off by Garrison's inability to weld ideals to pragmatism: how, in practice, were slaves to be freed or slavery combatted if all government, all coercion, even voting was off limits? ⁴⁴ The late 1830s and early 1840s, saw Smith beginning to urge not less intervention in politics, but precisely more; yet, he would not vote for any politician who in any way condoned slavery, even indirectly, and so, in 1840, since there were few such candidates to be found, Smith and other abolitionists of his stripe formed their own influential but short-lived political party, the Liberty Party. Smith would even run for president in 1848.⁴⁵

But mainstream politics proved to be only one of Smith's means of fighting racism, and by the mid-1840s, he was hovering on the verge of committing himself to grassroots social action. He only needed a small push, and it came from two seemingly disconnected places. The first is almost laughably mundane: he was drowning in debt. I'm told that vast inheritances can actually be a burden, and Smith's, at least, came with its own load. Along with land and cash, he found himself the inheritor of nearly \$500,000 in back taxes on various landholdings. To make matters worse, some of the deeds and proofs-of-sale were so dim that no one really knew which plot of land they described. Hundreds of pages of Smith's manuscript notes are devoted to relieving the headache of contrasting claims and sketchy descriptions, and he began to sincerely wish himself free of his financial obligations.⁴⁶ At the same time, sharp questions from his fellow reformers started pressing Smith on his commitment to social change. George Henry Evans, radical labor leader, Free Soiler (he coined the term) and editor of both the *Working Man's Advocate* and *People's Rights*, portrayed Smith as of the class of exploiters whose wealth was contingent on land monopoly.⁴⁷ In a rhetorical stab calculated to draw blood, Evans wrote,

I am informed that you are one of the largest landholders of this State, and, at the same time, one of the warmest advocate of the abolition of Negro Slavery.... You, of course, are not aware that there is an inconsistency in your conduct, or you could not be the honest man that you are represented to be. You will, therefore, be much surprised to be told, as I am constrained to tell you, that you are one of the biggest Slaveholders in the United States.

Evans was an agitator for radical land redistribution, the sort of thinker who saw that inequality was often rooted in absentee landlordism, cut of the same cloth as French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and anticipating single-taxer Henry George, who was to cause such a stir in the last decades of the nineteenth century out in California. Evans deliberately drew a line in the dust and demanded that Smith make it clear which side he was on. Smith knew it, and responded loudly that “it is also my belief...that the individual owners of large tracts of farming land should divide them into lots of say, forty or fifty acres, and then give away the lots to such of their poor brethren as wish to reside on them.”⁴⁸

Two problems—the crushing taxes of vast landholdings, and the suggestion that he was a Chippendale arm-chair radical—that proved to be each other’s solutions.

On August 1st of 1846, the anniversary of emancipation in the British West Indies, Smith formally announced a land redistribution strategy that would make Evans proud: he would transfer 120,000 acres in 40 acre parcels, the majority of it in the Adirondacks, to 3,000 black families for the token price of one dollar.⁴⁹ The climate was harsh, he knew: “I wish the land was in a less rigorous clime,” he wrote to Frederick Douglass, who was surprised to discover with Smith’s letter a deed for forty Adirondack acres, “but it is smooth and arable, and not wanting in fertility.”⁵⁰ Indeed, the land as a whole seemed to breath hope rather than despair, though it would take perseverance to stick through the hard times. Buried deep in Smith’s personal account books lies his frank assessment of land he would soon give away:

There is in the town of Franklin some very good and some very poor land.... The E part...is the best quality land. The first settlers of this town thought the land equal to the Illinois land, and it did produce well at that time. But the past cold season have discouraged the people....

They tell of raising Rye here 9 feet high. This season has been a very favorable season and crops look well [sic].⁵¹

Land that was neither smooth nor arable, he was sure, could profitably be logged. When he ran out of decent land to give away, he vowed to turn his fortune to purchase the freedom of southern slaves.⁵² It was a stunning plan, an ambitious plan—Smith eventually filled 102 pages of a ledger book with names and the exact parcels of land each received—and garnered huge support, not only among black New Yorkers, but from Evans himself.⁵³

Smith's proposal hinged on the labor of a handful of black abolitionists tasked with choosing specific individuals—all of whom, Smith decided, should embody his own understanding of Christian virtue: they were to be between 21 and 60, poor, landless, and sober—for a while, he even actively contemplated giving land to deserving black women.⁵⁴ Henry Highland Garnet (the fiery pastor of the Liberty Street Baptist Church, in Troy, New York), Dr. James McCune Smith (a writer, critic and esteemed physician trained in Europe), Theodore Wright (a Reverend and the first black graduate of Princeton), Charles B. Ray (editor of the black abolitionist newspaper, *The Colored American*) and Jermain Wesley Loguen (a runaway slave who would become a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church) scoured New York State looking for suitable pioneers whose names would be written on a slip of paper and drawn from a hat, though invariably, some of the chosen proved to be duds. In September of 1848, Henry Highland Garnet reported back to Smith that Moses Wilcox couldn't even steadily hold his deed in his hand, he was shaking so from delirium tremens, and the deed ought to be turned over to a Garrison Murray of Schenectady. Jacob Adkins turned out to be, simply, and "unworthy person," much less deserving than Nelson Thomson.⁵⁵ Only four days

later, in exasperation and disbelief, Garnet recommended that William Hill, “who turns out to be a notorious block head” be removed from the list of grantees.⁵⁶ On and on through the names of various beneficiaries, Smith’s agents culled the notorious, the drunken, and the downright befuddled in search of the few “picked men” who stood the best chance of turning the Adirondacks into a bastion of freedom. People like Charles B. D’Artois, a lineal descendent of France’s Charles X.⁵⁷

It was a massive amount of work that Smith and his agents undertook—hundreds of scraps of paper, notebooks, and letters, all of it only the barest indication of the real sweat put into organizing the land giveaway—and required the dedication of true belief. But Smith and his agents were driven by an intensity of purpose fueled by two powerful, intellectual currents in American culture, agrarianism and scientific racism, currents that relied on the tacit assumption that the environment shapes, and in some cases determines, human society. Though none of them were actually farmers, Smith, Garnet, McCune Smith, Ray, and Loguen, as well, explicitly considered themselves sympathetic to the soil’s husbands. “I am an Agrarian,” Smith wrote, capitalizing the peculiarity of his position. “I would that every man who desires a farm, might have one; and I would, that no man were so regardless of the needs and desires of his brother men, as to covet the possession of more farms than one.”⁵⁸ Here’s a good deal of Jefferson, democratic agrarianism—an ideology holding that the struggle of winning a living from the raw materials of the environment would refine out the human impurities of greed, corruption, and laziness, ensuring a morally sound citizenry.

But in the sixty-five years since Jefferson had penned his thoughts on the state of Virginia, much had changed, and a competing notion of agrarianism, aristocratic agrarianism, which theorized that leisure, the leisure to think and write and cultivate the finer aspects of

Western culture—not labor—ensured democracy, this non-democratic brand of agrarianism was making its mark.⁵⁹ If labor was left to the drudges, a “natural,” stable *Herrenvolk* hierarchy would ensue, and in the South, aristocracy depended utterly upon slavery. “Every plantation,” argued John Calhoun in 1838, “is a little community.... These small communities aggregated make the State in all, whose action, labor, and capital is equally represented and perfectly harmonized.”⁶⁰ George Fitzhugh, Virginia planter, lawyer, early sociologist, outspoken defender of slavery, and, ironically, cousin to Smith’s wife, agreed: human bondage was the only way to achieve Jefferson’s dream of a stable, prosperous, democratic people. “In Boston,” he wrote, “nine-tenths of the men in business fail. In the slaveholding South, except in new settlements, failures are extremely rare; small properties descend from generation to generation in the same family; there is as much stability and permanency of property as is compatible with energy and activity in society.”⁶¹

And so Smith was quick to clarify himself: “do not understand that I sympathize with the lawless, violent and bloody Agrarianism,” he wrote, distancing himself from the pro-slavery interests that drove American soldiers into Mexican territory, taking, at bayonet point, territory that southerners hoped would extend the reach of slavery, for though the Slave Power occluded the atriums of Congress, Northerners did not go gently into the night along with their notions of virtuous farming.⁶² Indeed, there was something like a cultural war being fought over the very idea of agrarianism itself: while pro-slavery advocates cultivated a poisoned ideal that depended on weeding liberty from southern soil, many Northern agrarians were beginning to link Dixie’s idle aristocratic slaveholders to environmental and moral degradation. In 1844, the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberty Tree*, ran an article by Kentucky senator Cassius Clay, in which he argued that human bondage “impoverishes the Soil and defaces the loveliest features of

Nature.... The wild brier and the red fox are now there the field growth and the inhabitants!" In an age, he continued, distinguished by steam power, he and his fellow Southerners were "living in centuries that are gone...! In the South where cotton and tobacco once rewarded the husbandmen, can now be seen sterile pine groves, clay banks and naked rocks."⁶³

Visually, too, Northerners sought to force the comparison between environment and labor, physical bodies and the health of the land. *The Tree of Liberty* shows small, virtuous farmers of the North sharply divided from slothful Southern gentleman (a reversal of the standard lazy-slave trope) and their brutalized slaves. While Northerners say, "I would not have a Slave to till my soil—to carry me—to fan me—to tremble when I wake for all the wealth that sinews bought & sold have ever earned," the slave whispers, "I wonder how many poor fellows' heads have been stuck upon poles," and the master, reclining on his settee hoisted upon the shoulders of his chattel, proclaims, "Surrounded by slaves & basking at ease by their labor we can have a clearer conception of the value of Liberty."⁶⁴



Figure 16: *The Tree of Liberty*, 1846. Courtesy American Antiquarian Society

Indeed, trees, for many in the North, became metaphors for a protective, liberating shade, the land of freedom grown from liberty trees. Thirza S. Pelton, of Oberlin, Ohio—fertile soil for antislavery sentiment—published a small book in 1850 called *The Grave in the Wilderness*, in which a husband and wife, torn from each other by slavery, take their leaves from their respective plantations, and fly North. Soon after crossing the Mason-Dixon line, hidden deep in the Pennsylvania’s woods, the wife, exhausted, dies: “Yes, dying at the very hour,/When first the forest trees/Assured him they’d been visited,/By freedom’s cheering breeze.” It was common for surveyors and land speculators to judge a patch of ground’s fertility by the sorts of trees it supported, and in the antebellum, antislavery U.S., those looking to sound a deeply resonant cultural note recruited sylvan literary comrades, and forced the difference between the freedom

of northern wilderness and the dark depravity of the Southern landscape: sterile soil, weedy brambles, thickets of poles topped by decapitated heads.

Put simply, many in the North started to intuit a link between environment and labor systems, and to wield this distinction ideologically: they were tracing the outlines of what we might call an ecology of hierarchy, one in which elite white domination depended on human and environmental exploitation.⁶⁵ The profits of slavery relied on stealing the earth's fertility quickly and thoroughly while throttling up the demand on black bodies to produce ever more, before death—of the land, of black human bodies—consumed the bottom line.⁶⁶ In an era when land was cheap and its limitless availability nearly an orthodox faith, but labor expensive, rapid exploitation made viciously logical capitalistic sense, and wealthy plantation owners moved often, leaving behind blighted landscapes and shallow graves.⁶⁷ Frederick Law Olmsted, in his 1859 report of his southern tour of inspection, confirmed what many in the North already suspected when he reached the Palmetto State: "Improvement and progress in South Carolina is forbidden by its present system."⁶⁸ Wherever one looked, whomever one spoke to, the impression of deformity could not be shaken off.

It was at this very point that agrarianism converged with a powerful tide of scientific racism based in environmental determinism. Ever since Jefferson rhetorically asked in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), "Will not a lover of natural history then, one who views the gradations in all the races of animals with the eye of philosophy, excuse an effort to keep those in the department of man as distinct as nature has formed them," America's finest scientific thinkers had been busily working to provide Jefferson a solid footing.⁶⁹ By the mid-nineteenth-century, natural scientist Samuel G. Morton seemingly proved what many white Americans already felt was true: after measuring the volume of around a thousand human skulls, he

discovered that African Americans were the very lowest order of humanity, and whites the pinnacle; different races were essentially different species; and race was immutable.⁷⁰ Then, in 1846, Louis Agassiz became a fast convert to Morton's racial science, for Morton gave Agassiz the missing keystone Agassiz needed to span the gullies between natural history, Christianity, and racial superiority. In a strikingly powerful environmental justification for hierarchy, Agassiz argued that each race has its own unchanging attributes: whites will always be statistically more artistic and intelligent, blacks always gregarious, musical, and physically strong. Each race also has its proper environment: whites belong in the North and in temperate climes, blacks in the tropics, and even if they migrate, no difference in attributes will ever appear. Finally, race is not only natural, but came with God's imprimatur. Agassiz's ultimate conclusion was that white supremacy was not solely cultural, social, or economic; it wasn't even, in the end, biologically bound. It was divine.⁷¹

With Jefferson, Agassiz, and God on their side, swimming with the tide of agrarianism and science at their backs, many throughout the United States were confident that African Americans had their natural place, socially and environmentally, and that it was an inferior, southern one; but it was a brittle, tenuous confidence, a quavering voice thinly disguised by a too-smiling assurance. After all, white Americans had been settling in climates supposedly unsuited to them for years: into the South and the treeless plains, into the deserts of the Southwest and up the Pacific Coast, white Americans flowed, and though they shivered and sweated with agues, tried to live in the land of little rain and constant wind, burned under scorching suns, and found new ways to mark time in a seasonless land, it nonetheless appeared that Americans *adapted*.⁷²

If this was true, if white Americans could adapt to the climates decreed by God as fit only for Indian or African, then what was to say that adaptation was not more generally a feature of humanity? What if race proved *not* to be divinely and environmentally determined, but mutable?

What if black agriculturalists could thrive in a harsh northern climate? What if they could cultivate crops and grow a free society in a land that America's scientific and political elite deemed for whites only? Those historians who have explored Timbuctoo, Blacksville, and Freeman's Home have come up with various arguments for Smith's largesse, and perhaps the most common is to understand the grants as political patronage. Smith's Liberty Party was looking for constituents, and, if given a small farm meeting the property requirement, the black voter would repay Smith's generosity at the ballot box.⁷³ Another interpretation is that Smith donated the land for a stop on the Underground Railroad.⁷⁴ These are valid arguments, but few plots were worth the \$250 voting qualification, and it would take years of improvement to meet that crucial threshold. And though the Adirondacks did indeed become an Underground Railroad stop, it seems that it was only a minor branch of the main trunk. I think there's a better reason that Smith chose 120,000 Adirondack acres out of the million acres at his disposal, an environmental reason: if black farmers could successfully cultivate the Adirondacks, if they could form a free society, then the world would have empirical proof that environmentally-determined scientific racism was a rotten sham.⁷⁵

5.

Geologist Ebenezer Emmons struggled with it, and historians continue to this day to try their hands at divining the lineage of the word, "Adirondack."

I think the best definition is: "possibility."

6.

There was something about the antebellum U.S., a utopian atmosphere of hope, which inflects the Adirondack experiment, though it's true that, with the exception of the radical northern wing of the Democrats—those anti-monopoly, anti-aristocracy, anti-slavery, and pro-land-distribution folks sympathetic to Smith's Liberty Party—the would-be destroyers of racism had few mainstream American intellectual and cultural foundations on which to ground their venture.⁷⁶ They couldn't even rely on the tradition of democratic agrarianism, which, even in the North, became increasingly Whiggish and elite in the mid-nineteenth century, increasingly based on exclusion; besides, if race was natural, if black was naturally inferior to white, then it was equally natural to exclude the lower orders of creation from the rights of white citizenship.⁷⁷

But just outside the mainstream ran a powerful countercurrent of socialist communitarianism, and by the time black pioneers started cultivating the Adirondacks, communes were everywhere.⁷⁸ Beginning in the early 1820s with Robert Owen, a secular American socialism worked its way into the landscape. Owen's success at raising a communal industrial town at New Lanark in Scotland made him internationally famous, a fame he took with him to the U.S. and used to help plant New Harmony, the first secular socialistic society in the U.S., in Indiana in 1824. His example eventually inspired the founding of nineteen other Owenite communities, and Owen himself became a celebrity, *especially* in a Jacksonian America where it was discovered that alienation and isolation were individualism's near cousins.⁷⁹

Massachusetts, home to the radical individualism of the transcendentalists, was also a hotbed of socialist fervor, and Thoreau, himself a bit too much of a prickly loner to throw in with the communards, nevertheless visited his friends at Brook Farm, founded in 1841 as a venture

dedicated, at first, to Transcendentalist principles, and later, after 1844, to Fourierism—a social philosophy of startling popularity that grounded itself in a cosmic science of harmony, offering a “comprehensive revolutionary vision,” of the good life. Brook Farm’s founder, Transcendentalist George Ripley was also a radical abolitionist and a member of Garrison’s New England Non-Resistance Society, and though Brook Farm wasn’t an abolitionist commune per se, its commitment to liberty neatly dovetailed with the theorists of anti-racism: no one should be forced to live against his or her ideals. Though the association would eventually dissolve, its seeds clung to the clothes of those who came to work in its fields, like Osborne MacDaniel, who took his communal experience to Louisiana, where he tried to set up a plantation along cooperative, Fourierist, abolitionist lines.⁸⁰

In nearby Harvard, Massachusetts, Bronson Alcott and the members of his radically anarchistic Fruitlands commune sought to remake society by first stripping everything down to the soil and reconsidering the most fundamental interaction between humans and the earth. It was 1843 and they wanted to do away with all forms of hierarchy—even domination over animals: they refused to eat meat, and went so far as to hitch themselves to their plows, rather than cruelly shift the burden to their beasts. Alcott, too, was a committed abolitionist, and though Fruitlands wasn’t necessarily an abolitionist commune, it was a commune in support of abolitionism.⁸¹

Over in the central part of the state, the biracial Northampton Association of Education and Industry, founded in 1842, *was* an abolitionist commune, and expressed Garrisonian nonviolence. Sojourner Truth joined the Association, and became one of its most active members while her fellow black abolitionist Samuel Ruggles also threw in his communal lot, and Frederick Douglass became a vocal supporter.⁸² “It seems to have represented,” wrote John

Humphrey Noyes, one of the nineteenth-century's most prolific and infamous utopians, "a class sometimes called 'Nothingarians.' But like Brook Farm and Hopedale, it was an independent Yankee attempt to regenerate society."⁸³ These Nothingarians articulated an antiracist, anti-hierarchy social philosophy that identified the economic imperative of competition as the foundation of racial exploitation. It was also the foundation of capitalism, and the Northamptonites understood that slavery and capitalism were not alternative social and economic orders, one Southern and one Northern, but dialectically intertwined, producing one overarching social order that exploited everybody. And so with their own silk factory and sawmill, their own school and communal barracks, their own farm fields and fruit orchards, the two hundred and twenty members went to work remaking the nation.

Like the Northampton Association, the Hopedale community, which lasted from 1841 to the late 1850s, was an anarchist attempt to recast every last brick in the mold of liberation. In fact, it's hard to find an aspect of society that Hopedale wasn't committed to rethinking:

[Hopedale] is a universal religious, moral, philanthropic, and social reform Association. It is a Missionary Society.... It is a moral suasion Temperance Society on a teetotal basis. It is a moral power Anti-Slavery Society, radical and without compromise. It is a Peace Society on the only impregnable foundation of Christian non-resistance. It is a sound theoretical and practical Women's Rights Association. It is a Charitable Society.... It is an Educational Society.... It is a socialistic Community.⁸⁴

When Adin Ballou, Hopedale's founder, looked out on the American scene, he saw a hellish picture where all the potentials of modernity were perversely, concertedly bent towards degradation. Goaded by the incessant lash of capitalism, "whereby mammon worship is perpetually encouraged and mutual helpfulness ignored...resulting in class distinctions, in gross inequalities of condition, in revolting extremes of wealth and poverty, of prodigal luxury and famishing want, of gorgeous display and loathsome destitution, engendering discontent, ill-will,

resentment, animosity, hatred, and sometimes the spirit of revenge and open violence,” the mass of Americans labored pointlessly for their masters’ benefits, while the aristocratic victors, red in tooth and claw, their pockets bulging with cash, idly watched.⁸⁵ It’s not hard to see how a community dedicated to jamming the System’s cogs would have embraced abolitionist reforms, and indeed, in 1842, the members had their hearts “moved and melted” by Frederick Douglass, and in 1845, Rosetta Hall, an escaped slave and Douglass protégé made the community her home.⁸⁶ Ellen and William Craft, who had taken permanent leave of their Georgia owner, spent time at Hopedale, as did the infamous slave rescuer, Jonathan Walker, known as The Man with the Branded Hand.⁸⁷

Back in New York State sat Gerrit Smith, not only aware of America’s communal societies, but intimately connected to them. John Collins, who knew Smith from the American Anti-Slavery Society, organized a Property Convention in 1843, which surely attracted Smith’s attention. That same year, Collins bought three hundred and fifty acres in Skaneateles, right in Smith’s backyard, and started his own very serious—and evidently no fun—“No-God, No-Government, No-Money, No-Meat, No-Salt and Pepper” commune.⁸⁸ And the Smiths were good friends with none other than John Humphrey Noyes, who in 1848 founded the Oneida Community in Madison County—the same county that Smith lived in—one of the longest running and most successful of the nineteenth-century communes.⁸⁹ Perhaps it was with Noyes’s encouragement that Smith wrote letters in praise and support of Hopedale.⁹⁰ Perhaps not. But in any case, the utopian spirit of socialism worked its charms on Smith.⁹¹

Currents have a way of diffusing: they are fluid and it is of their nature to mix, to continually form anew. It’s a demon of a scientific fantasy which tries to keep currents separate, pure, discrete. Of course utopian socialism and abolition mixed, though historical scholarly

literature is all but silent on the matter.⁹² And of course environmental thinking formed a third channel in this braided intellectual and cultural stream.

7.

Though the various communes and social experiments were never part of one single, coherent, disciplined social philosophy, there was a remarkable degree of intellectual overlap centered on the mutually sustaining relationship between human society and nature. Every association—from the rural Brook Farm and Fruitlands to the more urban New Harmony and Northampton—understood that cultivating a just society required rethinking the mode of relating more generally, beginning with the soil. It meant that one could not accept domination on one hand and advocate for equality on the other. Space, environment, they all seemed to intuit, was not a blank canvas, or, even worse, a bank of “natural resources” to be drawn down, but a living thing that formed and reformed even as it was being made and remade. Freedom and equality can’t exist in a landscape of slavery and subordination. Beauty and music can’t thrive amid wretchedness and the din of clashing gears.

Historians too often deride utopians as privileged folks able to wall themselves off from society—and history—who turned their back and removed themselves, often to the wilderness, leaving the real work for others. But the cultural space of Jefferson and Agassiz, that is to say, the dominant American cultural space of the nineteenth-century was utterly dependent upon domination, shot-through by hierarchy and exploitation, and the utopians were one of the few groups of American who clearly saw this and offered an alternative. To utopians—black and white, slave and free—who had spent decades in rigorous Bible study, the lessons of Abraham, who came out from society to found a nation in the wild, and Moses, who led his people, held as

slaves, from a corrupt, civilized Egypt into virtuously raw Nature, were clear: wilderness was a place to know God directly, unhindered by vulgar authority, a place to purify intention and gather strength before entering the land of milk and honey, a place of freedom and a place of potential for a new, better world.⁹³

And so when Alcott and his comrades hitched themselves to their own plows to spare their animals, we moderns can snicker at the naïve utopianism of urban intellectuals who knew nothing about “real” toil, but we miss the point when we do, just as when we snidely dismiss the attempt of Brook Farmers to unite labor—both mental and manual—across class and cultural divides. The Fruitlands vision is a beautiful one, and I’m convinced that, though it might seem strange, or even naïve, the members of Fruitlands, more rigorously than nearly anyone else I’ve ever studied, sought to live the life that they dreamed, and they were convinced that change, peaceful and radical change, driven by the motive power of a devoted spirit, was possible. Meaningful labor, labor that connected a person to the land and the surrounding community was key to the vision of not just Fruitlands, but all of the utopian socialist communes. Underlying everything that these utopians did was a desire to connect across seeming boundaries; to associate; to grow a just and free society through fulfilling farm work that would also enhance the fecundity of the earth; to create goods—silk or lumber or silverware—not commodities, but *goods*, that made one’s life richer through beauty and functionality and the pride of a job well done; to join hands, black and white, male and female, calloused and soft, and stand on an equal footing; to form a landscape—both literally and imaginatively—that bore witness to the truth that fruitful lives and fruitful societies and a fruitful earth are all necessary for each other’s safe-keeping. It’s a vision of ecology, a subversive ecology not of competition and a struggle for survival, but of mutual aid.⁹⁴ It’s a vision that made its way north to the Adirondacks.⁹⁵

There were many paths one might take to find freedom's ecology, but for the self-declared agrarians Gerrit Smith, James McCune Smith, Charles Ray, Henry Highland Garnet, Theodore Wright, Jermain Wesley Loguen, and their supporters, one stood out. They were abolitionists, sure, but they were also radical environmentalists, just the sort to extend Thoreau's solitary stay at Walden pond—he was still hoeing at his woodland rows of beans in 1846, except for his night in jail—into a social, community experiment, just the sort to defiantly wade out into the tidal wave of environmental racism backed by Jefferson and Agassiz. Like the Walden woods, the Adirondack Mountains were to be a generative landscape, a place to front fundamental facts, to see things for what they really were, a place of concord giving birth to a new world. Borrowing from the socialist experiments of their communitarian neighbors and the democratic agrarian tradition, as well as an African American ethic celebrating work as a means of knowing the land, they practiced a kind of utopian agrarianism in which the difference between cultivator and cultivar was never quite clear. People and the land were dialectically, mutually fused through labor, and it was impossible for one to be free while the other was chained. A degraded landscape meant that those living on it *must* suffer; likewise a people driven to work with the lash watched the landscape bleed in sympathy. Redemption could only come through cultivation. “Happy, thrice happy, will it be,” wrote Smith, “when land shall be no more bought and sold!—when, like salvation, it hall be free, without money and without price...! Then, too, there will be no slavery.—Before the reduced-to-practice theories of land-reform, slavery would disappear as surely, and as speedily, as the mists of morning before the rising sun. Apportion the soil equally among its equal owners, and there would be no room for slavery.”⁹⁶

It would have been remarkable had Smith been the sole evangel boosting utopian agrarianism as a way to cultivate an ecology of freedom, but even more than the white abolitionist, it was his black comrades who articulated the mountains' hope:

In a climate, in which labour is a means for the full and free development of the energies of mankind—in the heart of an almost free state—protected by nearly equal laws—with an equal right to common school education—amidst the friction of advancing civilization—and at a time when the light of science falling upon it has made almost any soil productive—the earth, a free gift, beckons us to come and till it.⁹⁷

It sounds familiar, this declaration by Wright, Ray, and McCune Smith, its rhythms similar to the martial strains of Manifest Destiny, but it's a conditional piece with all of its almossts and nearlys and downward dragging friction. If, in many minds, Manifest Destiny was explicitly linked to the extension of slavery and the triumph of exploitation—of land, of people—in Timbuctoo and Blacksville and Freeman's Home the words and phrases of expansion were set to a different tune, a sort of alternative expansionism: "The occupation of those lands will form an era in the history of the free colored men in this State. We should like to be among the first to occupy the wilderness, and strike the first blow toward making it blossom like the rose," wrote one contributor to *The North Star*, his prose deliberately vague, filled with the possibility of imprecision: what lands? what State, the political one or the one of slavery? what wilderness, the Adirondacks, or a dry desert, the savagery of human bondage? and what is the rose: a metonym for agriculture, or something a bit more ineffable, transitory, rare, beautiful and patient and delicate, something that required the knowing, careful hands of a cultivator?⁹⁸

The space, too, is spun about, the nation's compass given a disorienting sideways jolt by these utopian agrarians who replaced the familiar celestial signs of setting suns guiding white Easterners out to colonize the red West have been replaced by Polaris and the Southern Cross, of black pioneers colonizing, civilizing a white North. "There is no prejudice under which we

suffer,” wrote Smith’s agents, “which may not be removed, no oppression under which we labour, which may not be meliorated, by a prompt and energetic movement in the direction of this glorious opportunity.” There is something of the booster’s faith in Wright, Ray, and McCune Smith. But they continue: “Once in possession of, once *upon our own land* we will be our own masters, free to think, free to act.... Thus placed in an independent condition, we will not only be independent, in ourselves, but will overcome that *prejudice against condition*, which has so long been a mill around our necks.”⁹⁹ With the mill-stone gone, the pioneers could stand upright, “tall, stalwart, hard-fisted, they embody a Hope of the Race,” McCune Smith wrote back to his friend in Peterboro, sure that cultivating the land was another way to cultivate the self.¹⁰⁰

Seeking to build an alternative social, cultural, and economic landscape, reconfigured the typical trope of individualized Manifest Destiny into one that worked towards a common good.¹⁰¹ Farming in the Adirondack Mountains would throw people of all hues together: “There is no life like that of the farmer, for overcoming the mere prejudice against color. The owners of adjacent farms are *neighbors*.... There must be mutual assistance, mutual and equal dependence, mutual sympathy—and labour, the ‘common destiny of the American people,’ under such circumstances, yields equally to all, and makes all equal.” Here the trope of the lazy Southern planter, sun-struck and debauched with ill-gotten privilege, shatters against the imagined landscape of Northern farmer, made hearty by the challenges of living in a colder climate.¹⁰² A page later, bewitched by their own language emphasizing through repetition a common humanity in labor, Wright, Ray, and McCune Smith write, “Hence a number, starting out together for the same neighborhood, may by mutual aid, effect a great deal in meeting with and overcoming the first and severest difficulties.”¹⁰³

Underlying all of this blooming-wilderness-and-mutual-aid rhetoric is an incipient argument about nature and labor, an outgrowth of communitarian thinking, and though it never got clearly, rigorously articulated, what starts to emerge from the pens of the grantees themselves is a sort of inchoate environmental philosophy mixing work and wilderness with both political and metaphysical freedom.¹⁰⁴ And if all of this theorizing, this belief in the power of landscape and sweat to radically remold the nation seems grandiose, it did not to the black communities of New York. Newspapers and conventions throughout the Northeast, in defiance of modern historians who have resigned the experiment to a footnote in the history of John Brown at best, resoundingly endorsed the plan and the settlers.¹⁰⁵ Though the unknown Great Northern Wilderness caused a certain amount of consternation among the grantees, and something less that 200 actually settled their lands, it could do nothing to dampen the ardor of their spirits, and in 1847 thanks started to pour in: conventions of grantees in Ithaca and Rochester both honored Smith and planned for their move north.¹⁰⁶ Willis Hodges of the *Ram's Horn* used the pages of his paper to trumpet the Adirondacks, while *The Albany Patriot* and the *Impartial Citizen* from Syracuse published first-hand accounts and editorials further voicing the black community's support for the pioneers. And in 1848 reports flooded in of various conventions and meetings, all of which awaited the Adirondack sun that would rise over a new society. From Troy, home ground of Garnett's church, came resolution after resolution to occupy the lands as soon as possible, to "even deprive themselves of the necessary comforts of life in order that they may reach their lands."¹⁰⁷ Frederick Douglass threw his full weight behind the plan: between 1848 and 1850, at least nineteen articles on the Adirondacks appeared in his paper, *The North Star*, and he exhorted his readers in language that mixed military metaphors with religion, the pioneer's rosy western hope for the future with the slave's nightmarish present:

Advantage should be at once taken of this generous and magnificent donation.... The sharp axe of the sable-armed pioneer should be at once uplifted over the soil of Franklin and Essex counties, and the noise of falling trees proclaim the glorious dawn of civilization throughout their borders.... What a man soweth that he shall reap.... Come, brethren, let it not be said, that a people who, under the lash, could level the forests of Virginia, Maryland, and the whole Southern States, that their oppressors might reap the reward, lack the energy and manly ambition to clear lands for themselves.¹⁰⁸

By 1848, that year of socialist revolution in Europe, Smith could write that “some twenty or thirty are comfortably settled” on their new land, and that “the remainder are preparing to follow them in the Spring. Would that the three thousand grantees were all in their homes and tillers of their own acres!”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the spring of 1848 saw Willis Hodges, editor of the *Ram’s Horn* selling his interests in the paper in order to hitch a team to his wagon and head north to Franklin County. He moved not without trepidation—he had grown up on a farm in Virginia, the son of a free black farmer, and he knew the challenge of farming on the Adirondacks’ thin soil; nevertheless, in May he led a group of four families and five single men to Blacksville, on Loon Lake.¹¹⁰

To help fan pioneer flames, reports streamed back south extolling the health of the country: Charles B. Ray himself took a tour of the lands in 1847, and reported that, “it is scarcely necessary to say that he found the land all fairer than you [Gerrit Smith] represented it to be; considering it to be ‘about the best land out doors.’”¹¹¹ The next year, a Mr. Jefferson travelled back to his home church in Troy to “give a very interesting history of [the Adirondacks], and recommends all those that have land there, not to part with it under any consideration.”¹¹² Surely one of the most buoying descriptions was Jermain Wesley Loguen’s, who spent seven weeks in August and September, 1848, travelling throughout the region.

I visited in person many of these lands.... In Essex County, judging from my own observations, and from the statements made to me, by the most trustworthy men, I feel confident in saying, that the farms given by Mr. Smith, with very few

exceptions, are as good land as any man can need. In Franklin County, I visited many more of the lands in person, than I did in Essex. I found some there that I considered first-rate; many that would not be good for tillage, but are very valuable for the timber upon them; and not one that is worthless. The timber in that region is coming to be sought after more and more by the lumber merchants, who are multiplying their sawmills. So that I am sure those who will hold on to and take care of their lots, cannot fail, in a few years, to derive from them a “handsome income.”¹¹³

Finally, James Henderson, the sole cobbler in all of Essex County, a living witness to the Adirondacks’ fecundity, reported in 1849 that his own patch of wilderness was in full flower.¹¹⁴ “There is no better land for grain,” he wrote: “We get from 25 to 50 bushels of oats to the acre.... And for potatoes and turnips...we get from 200 to 400 to the acre.—The farmers here get 46 cents per bushel, cash in hand, for their oats.”¹¹⁵

Even before reaching their new homes, the grantees understood an alchemical relationship between labor, land, and freedom.¹¹⁶ In letter after letter, contributors to the *North Star* wrote that settling the Adirondacks would be a sort of homecoming, in defiance of Agassiz’s environmental determinism. As one commentator put it, “The country is a wilderness...that colored people are not accustomed to hardships.... Our forefathers have made this country, once a wilderness, a delightful home for their oppressors, the Anglo-Saxon race.”¹¹⁷ Autonomous racial uplift, grounded in husbandry, was certainly a part of the appeal: “Colored Americans will have developed one means of their elevation,” proclaimed the grantees from Rochester, “when they leave the subordinate offices now assigned them in the cities, and aspire for the soil.”¹¹⁸ But it’s not just up-y-the-bootstraps rhetoric: they meant to be agrarians, to better themselves, the soil, and their surrounding society in a dialectical process of mutual cultivation.

In January of 1849, the National Convention of Colored People published their conclusion that “the freedom, independence and steadiness of a farmer’s life will throw among the colored people elements of character essential to happiness and progress.” And there was one

specific path to happiness and progress: “This Convention do call upon the Grantees of this land to forsake the cities and towns and to settle upon this land and cultivate it, and thereby build a tower of strength for themselves.... We recommend to our people, also, throughout the country, to forsake the cities and their employments of dependency and emigrate to those parts of the country where land is cheap, and become cultivators of the soil, as the surest road to respectability and worth.”¹¹⁹ William Jones, a former slave who had emancipated himself, listened to an address at Henry Highland Garnet’s Liberty Street Church, and then rose to speak to the gathering, urging the assembled to leave the night of human exploitation behind, take their land, and thereby step into the full sunlight of society. “God bless Mr. Gerrit Smith, and all the Smiths” began his speech, “come off the steamboats—leave your barber shops—leave the kitchen, where you have to live underground all day and climb up ten pair of stairs at night. Tomorrow morning I intend to leave for Essex County to see for myself.”¹²⁰

There is a sort of ecology to the pioneers’ sentences themselves, a symbiotic web of interrelated thoughts stitched together by repetition, inversion, and reformulation:

“The country is a wilderness.... This country, once a wilderness...a delightful home.”

“Leave the subordinate office.... Aspire for the soil.”

“Forsake the cities and towns.... Forsake the cities and their employments of dependency.”

“Come off...leave...leave...leave for Essex County.”

It could be a twisting Romantic poem celebrating the wholesome purity of the woods against the closeness of the city, a rejection of both dependency and exploitation, an individualistic song in praise of the out-of-doors, the sort of thing that we commonly associate more with an Emerson or Whitman rather than a Douglass or McCune Smith. And it is partly

that. But it's also something different, for the purity of the woods, the pioneers tell us, is useless unless it can redeem a depraved civilization—the twist on the Romantic tradition is that for utopian agrarians like Smith, McCune Smith, and the 3,000 pioneers, manual labor is the bridge to the promised land. Wildernesses don't bloom by themselves, people don't simply thrive in isolation, racism doesn't die when you close your eyes and stop up your ears. Paradox is key in these tracts, where the reader is urged to come up and out from the underground kitchens in order to sink roots back down and into the soil—to aspire, to raise oneself to the level of the soil—to forsake, to remove, to leave in order to set down and belong.

All of this takes work, and it is precisely through work that many in the nineteenth-century came to discover themselves as one strand in an ecological web. Indeed, work was probably the primary way through which African Americans naturalized themselves as ecological citizens—but they weren't alone.¹²¹ Though “work” and “wilderness” still seem like antithetical notions to many of our twenty-first-century minds, wilderness hadn't yet hardened into the notion of a place where humans are only visitors and leave no trace, a place to go find therapy and return to the bustle of the real world with batteries recharged. Yet, in the 1840s, wilderness was a fluid concept, and could be a place of work—even a home. Kimberly K. Smith outlines a black wilderness tradition that “is centrally concerned with the relationship between identity and landscape, and particularly the historical relationship between a community and the land as that land is mediated by memory. Those concerns give shape to a distinctive concept of wilderness...I call ‘the black concept.’”¹²² Leave aside for the moment that there's nothing essentially black about this definition of a black wilderness concept—indeed, it equally well describe Fruitlands or Brook Farm, and sounds like a good brief of Thoreau's philosophy of the wild, an expansion of his question, “*who* are we? *where* are we?” that he asked in 1846(!). What

Smith has identified as a key to the black wilderness is the relationship of a community to the land, a relationship that presupposes a past long enough for wilderness to have staked a claim in the community's memory. It's a definition of wilderness that all but presupposes occupation and the active influence of laboring hands, and really has little to do with the classic notion of the lone, white, male sojourner coming face to face with sublime Nature while on vacation.

This is why many of the pioneers and their supporters write of axes felling trees, of clearing land and planting grain, why they never experience the involuntary shudder of today's environmentalists when "axe" and "wilderness" wind up in the same sentence. And though they spoke openly of use, I do think that their vision of a proper human role in nature was fundamentally different from what the promoters of Manifest Destiny meant when they envisioned forests falling to amber waves of grain.

For by the 1850s, the Adirondack forest was beginning to show the brunt of market-based, industrial logging. It wasn't so much that the timber barons were stripping their land bare for lumber—that wouldn't seriously start to occur until after the Civil War—but that large tanneries, which had set up shop all along the fringes of the Adirondacks, were systematically targeting the mountains' hemlock whose bark was the primary source of the tanners' tannin. A large tannery needed 6,000 cords of bark a year (a cord is 4'x4'x8'—picture the bed of a pickup truck filled to the top of the cab), and there were over 50 large tanneries—as well as 75 or so smaller ones—sending their loggers into the woods. The result was that, by the 1890s, the tanneries had cut over a million to a million-and-a-half acres of forest.

At the same time, the various iron forges and furnaces—intensely capitalized big businesses—dotting the Adirondacks were consuming charcoal at a voluminous rate. And because charcoal can be made from any species of hardwood, entire forests, as much as 7,000

acres per year during the peak, mid-century years of iron production, fell to the market's axe. If tanning left the forest thinned of its hemlock—which infrequently occurred in pure stands—the forges left the landscape bald.¹²³

It was into the middle of this logging free-for-all that the pioneers stepped, and though they intended to partially clear their land, as farmers had been doing in the Adirondacks for generations, such clearings had historically had negligible effects on the overall ecological character of the forest.¹²⁴ Even the character of the farmers' clearings differed from the sylvan boneyards of industry, for the fields were a person's home, the clearings maintained to ensure continual growth, rather than the cut-and-get-out philosophy of the industrial forest.¹²⁵ The clearings were to be husbanded, rather than plundered; they were a place providing a modest economic independence rather than the waste leftover from turning wood into gold. And for the black pioneers, excluded from equality, they were a living home: "The land is open to them. The land has just as much respect for a black man as it has for a white one.—Let our colored brethren betake themselves to it."¹²⁶

8.

When James McCune Smith finally betook himself Adirondack to soil, he found his salvation. In late 1846, Smith had asked him to help pen an address to black New Yorkers, but McCune Smith hesitated. He was depressed, I think, and feeling beaten, feeling like a lifetime of hard work, work that he had poured every ounce of his soul into, was all worth exactly nothing. If anybody in the United States had meticulously groomed himself according to all the strictures of the self-made man, it was McCune Smith—the Rockefellers and Carnegies, all the Ragged Dicks of a later generation, shabbily stood in his shadow. He was the first professionally trained

black physician in the U.S., but since his color barred him from entrance into any American school, he went abroad and earned a B.A., M.A., and M.D. from the University of Glasgow. He was considered by Douglass and his fellow black abolitionist leader, Alexander Crummell, to be one of the most important intellectuals of his time—indeed, he wrote the introduction to Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855)—and he was an essayist and literary critic (he published a review of *Moby Dick* in 1856). Indeed his biographer, John Stauffer, with a touch of hyperbole, ranks his prose as stylistically equal to that of Emerson, Thoreau and all the best writers of the 1920s Harlem Renaissance, combined.¹²⁷ But in most white eyes, all of this meant nothing, absolutely nothing beside his black skin. And so when Smith asked him to help co-write a broadside encouraging settlement in the Adirondacks, McCune Smith replied:

I have no heart to write it. Each succeeding day, that terrible [intolerant white] majority falls sadder, heavier, more crushingly on my soul. At times I am so weaned from life, that I could lay me down and die, with the prayer, that the memory of this existence should be blotted from my soul.

The good doctor was sick. He wanted nothing to do with a festering America, white or black, and instead fixed his eyes on the longed-for bliss of annihilation. He had stared into the face of hatred long enough:

There is in that majority a hate deeper than I had imagined. Caste, the creature of condition, I supposed to be feebler than any strong necessity. Yet here came a necessity, the strongest this people knows—a political necessity—and lo! it is weaker than caste! Money is weaker than caste; Political necessity is weaker than caste—to what else will this stiff-necked people yield? Labouring under these views, I cannot write a cheering word & I will not write a discouraging one.

McCune Smith was dangerously close to convincing himself that racism sprang from soil more poisoned than competitive economics; that it was something inbred, something that remained unyielding to every attempt at reason, moral suasion, nonviolence. But he also knew that

“physical force has no place,” in “changing the heart of the whites.” And so suicide seemed the only way out.

In his despair, he lashed out at Smith and his Adirondack plans; he was trying to hurt and accused Smith of simple-mindedly kowtowing to an economic system expressly designed to foster inequality. What good was the vote, what good was \$250 worth of land if it was inanimate property, rather than the person that ended up with political recognition? It was an obscenity that manhood was not enough, and an insult that dirt was worth more. McCune Smith didn’t want to be the dependent of his possessions—their spokesman, merely—he wanted to be recognized only because he was a person. Wasn’t Smith simply playing the game, legitimizing disenfranchisement, hierarchy, and domination with his get-out-the-vote scheme?

My personal influence, manhood, presence at the ballot box is utterly destroyed when the earth-owning oath is thrust at me. The negro Man is merged into the negro Land-owner. The point of the moral is dipped into poison. It is established by our oath, that the vile earth has rights superior to Mankind! That ‘the dust of the earth’ is the greater, without ‘the breath of life.’ What horrible mockery! Is it right to be a party to such Blasphemy?¹²⁸

But in the end, McCune Smith choked back the acrid bile, and helped to write the letter.

I wonder: what is it that he found? Maybe he sat down with his pen and a stack of paper, and mechanically wrote, synapses firing, muscles twitching out the phrases in an unconscious act of duty. But I think something else happened: I think he opened his eyes wide and realized that voting was a secondary consideration, that “‘the dust of the earth,’” and “‘the breath of life,’” by themselves, were nothing, but combined gave birth to something living, thinking, active. That in the union of the two was the birth of history.

I also think he started meeting the pioneers themselves, and was impressed.

When McCune Smith wrote that Smith’s plan merely turned the “negro Man” into the “negro Land-owner,” a sort of declension, he assumed that the Adirondacks were to instill the

very sort of individual up-by-the-bootstraps ethic that had proved to be such superficial dressing in his own life. Individualism alone would not kill racism, but as it turns out, the pioneers already knew this. In November, 1846, one month before McCune Smith mailed his letter of despair (and three months after Smith had made his proclamation), a committee of pioneers from Albany who had heard of Smith's plan contacted Smith with an idea of their own: they wanted him to sell them 75,000 Adirondack acres, for ten cents an acre, and they would then divide the land into 100 to 200 acre lots, open to parties of African Americans, the land to be owned individually but worked cooperatively.¹²⁹ I don't think this plan ever came to much—it's a lot of land and a lot of money to scrape together, and I haven't been able to find any record of such a plot on Adirondack soil—except that it shows northern African Americans as actively engaged in thinking through the logic of Adirondack settlement, and leaning towards some sort of more communal model. This, I think, grabbed McCune Smith hard and shook him from his stupor: individualism was bankrupt, but a joint venture could work.

Six months later, in the spring of 1847, Charles B. Ray had returned from his tour of inspection, with his glowing report of the Adirondack land. His whole family had been excited about the trip: indeed, his young daughter couldn't stop talking about Essex County and declared herself an "Essex Co girl."¹³⁰ In fact, the only fault he could find was with the plot he and McCune Smith had been given, and the two men sat down to write a letter to their benefactor. It wasn't just that the land was poor, "almost entirely unfit for cultivation as it lies almost entirely on the north side of a very rocky high hill." By far the worst of it was that the plot was spatially distant from the hub of activity, and they requested a relocation to a parcel with a more "central position" near the Deacon Iddo Osgood, one of the original white settlers of North Elba, a tavern owner, and, it seems, one of the pillars of the rustic society.¹³¹ By the spring of 1848, the sap was

starting to rise in McCune Smith's veins. He noted that "there is a good spirit amongst the grantees who have received their deeds," and that "I look with joy to mixing with the strong hardy men, when they shall have completed their plans."¹³² In July, 1848, a company of pioneers returned to New York City to tell McCune Smith and others of their triumphs, and to seek support for a cooperative plan: each settler would pay \$1.25 initiation and fifty-cents a month thereafter in dues to join a common fund; the proceeds would then be used to survey each member's lot, cut roads, clear land—in short, to ensure community development. McCune Smith liked what he heard so much that he felt "very desirous to go on the good land," and even began fundraising for a good team of horses or oxen, to be held by the pioneers in common, for the purpose of shipping and delivering goods, baggage, and people to and from Port Kent—one of the main jumping-off places for the Adirondacks.¹³³ He was excited, his hope rekindled, and it burned with a hotter, longer-lasting intensity than ever.

Then, in the fall of 1850—that terrible fall that saw the passage of the Compromise of 1850 and with it a strengthened Fugitive Slave Act—McCune Smith's first child, his daughter Amy, died. He was devastated. He wrote of it to his friend, Smith, and even in the climate-controlled, privileged inner sanctum of Syracuse University's Special Collections reading room, even after 162 years, I find his words throat-constricting. What is it like to lose your child? I can't imagine—as a new father, I don't want to. I can't imagine the void, can't imagine the feelings—guilt? futility? rage? emptiness?—can't imagine how a person finds any motivation to go on with it all. But McCune Smith somehow continued, wending his way from the unspeakable to the possible. He had spent a few weeks in the mountains, in September, soon before he lost Amy, and his letter to Smith is less a report than a testimony. He mentioned that about sixty pioneers, "of all ages and sex," were settled around North Elba, an association that,

since it harbored runaway slaves, was now officially criminal. Nevertheless, though they were outlaws in the eyes of the Federal Government, and though money was tight, their spirits were high, and they were industrious: “They had put up several good log houses.... I think more clearing has been done within a year in To[wnship] 12 than in any three years together of late.”¹³⁴

But I think what he really wanted to tell Smith was what he had found his faith in the woods: “I felt myself a ‘lad indeed’ beneath the lofty spruce and maple and birches, and by the babbling brook, which your deed made mine, and would gladly exchange this bustling anxious life for the repose of that majestic country, could I see the day clear for a livelihood for myself and family.” McCune Smith didn’t and wouldn’t move to his Adirondack land—his ties to New York City were too strong—but nevertheless standing on his own patch, with the maple and birches and evergreen spruce as witnesses, he was reborn. In spite of the fact that, with the stroke of Henry Clay’s compromising pen, his activities were now illegal, even though he was grieving for his daughter, he found repose. He found music: “As we went north thro’ township 11 and 10, we found...here and there colored settlers making their woods ring with the music of their axe strokes.”¹³⁵

John Thomas was one of these settlers. In 1839 Thomas ran away from the Maryland plantation of his master, Ezekiel Merrick, after Merrick sold his wife off-plantation. Over a period of nine years, Thomas slowly made his way from Maryland, to Philadelphia, Troy, and, finally, Essex County. Illiterate but grateful, in 1872 he hired someone to write a letter for him to Gerrit Smith, a beautiful bit of correspondence, written in an unhurried, steady hand that adorned the letters with graceful arabesques. Thomas began by praising Smith’s “benevolence towards myself, as well as my Colored Brothers generally,” before moving on to detail his life in the

Adirondacks. Originally given a forty-acre tract he sold it “owing to inconveniences of Church and school principles.” But rather than leave the mountains, Thomas bought a different plot, closer to his community’s center, “which by labor and economy has been enlarged into a handsome farm of two hundred acres; with all necessary stock and farming implements. I generally have a surplus of two or three hundred dollars worth of farm produce to sell, every year.” Thomas had made it, and in closing, testified that owning land, farming it, allowing it to flower had actively changed him: “I have breasted the storm of prejudice and opposition, until I begin to be regarded as an ‘American Citizen.’”¹³⁶

This is what we miss when we skim over the free soil of the Adirondacks as a site of abolitionist struggle: a heady mix of labor, environment, race, and anti-authoritarianism. Rather than a retreat, Gerrit Smith and the black abolitionists located the Adirondacks on the very front lines of the struggle for racial equality. Northern air spiced by the scents of evergreens was not only stirring to African-American lungs, but nationally revivifying. There’s a common humanity at work in their writing: the climate is salubrious for “the energies of mankind,” and racism, rather than endemic to black skin, as Jefferson would have it, is rooted in an enforced landlessness. *Landlessness*—not biology, not God’s will, but a mere social condition—begets dependency and exploitation, and so the problem of racism, indeed the problem of hierarchy and inferiority, had a social solution.

It was healthy country, settled by healthy pioneers, who were cultivating a healthy society.

And yet, today, thousands of hikers walk on trails over land that once belonged to black farmers, with no intimation that it was ever anything but virgin territory. The Adirondacks did not become the staging ground for ending racism, and little by little through the late 1850s most of the pioneers trickled back to their New York homes. James McCune Smith tells us why.

“Unless...I can make enough to secure an income of \$400 per annum, I must defer settling in Essex County.... Could we get about 200 settlers in North Elba, and then cut off all communication with the city (burn the galleys) things could be made to prosper,” he wrote from his New York City home.¹³⁷ His is a refrain heard all too frequently in mainstream environmental activism coming from folks perfectly willing to fly around the world giving speeches about the evils of the internal combustion engine, to advocate the proper course of action for others while excusing one’s own concerns as exceptional, and it’s not as if he was alone in this: Frederick Douglass never moved north, nor did William Wells Brown or Henry Bibb, prominent black abolitionists, escaped slaves, authors, and owners of Adirondack land, all. Nor was Gerrit Smith himself at all disposed to go back to the land. Yet I’m not inclined, ultimately, to skewer McCune Smith with his own unintended irony (just as I’m not willing to dismiss jet-set environmentalists), for it’s not as if there weren’t plenty of capable hands and minds in Essex and Franklin counties, many of them with a solid background in farming.

Even so, part of the reason that black Adirondack farmers didn’t stick in the mountains is that even those expert cultivators weren’t prepared for the ecological realities of the Great Northern Wilderness. In fact, nearly anyone whose agricultural experience was learned anywhere but in the Northeast’s highest and coldest elevations, those places with the thinnest, rockiest soil—the hill countries of Maine, Vermont, or New Hampshire—found their knowledge sorely tested in Essex and Franklin Counties: then as now, farming is an exercise in faith. The window

of good weather is very narrow, and freak frosts can occur almost anytime of the year. Without diversifying one's sources of income, without logging, guiding, trapping, innkeeping or other activities, it's hard to make ends meet. It was even harder for those who had made their livings as barbers, mechanics, or laborers in New York City: for many of them, Adirondack life was just too tenuous.¹³⁸

But, again, I'm not inclined to wave away the ultimate demise of Adirondack as simple naïveté—the pioneers could and did learn to adapt. It's something else, I think, and it's again McCune Smith who offhandedly points to the fault, the weakness that ultimately buckled and shook the experiment to the ground. "As a general thing," he wrote in 1850, "the parties had not enough money at the outset, and had failed in making up the deficiency partly from the backwardness of the season and partly from having waited too long for Mr. John Brown's team."¹³⁹

John Brown was a deeply religious man fascinated by violence, and who believed slavery a mortal sin and himself God's vengeful enforcer.¹⁴⁰ Like Smith, he was a fundamentalist, but his was a hierarchical fundamentalism, one that thrived upon force: the chosen were meant to lead, by any means necessary. And there was no doubt in Brown's mind that he was chosen, even though he had also been a consistent failure at every business he had turned his hand to, having the bad luck to hatch his riskiest schemes at the most inopportune moments. In 1848, he was penniless. And so in April, with nowhere to go and mounting debts dogging his steps, he headed to Peterboro, met Gerrit Smith, and grandiloquently declared, "I am something of a pioneer; I grew up among the woods and wild Indians of Ohio, and am used to the climate and the way of living that your colony find so trying. I will take one of your farms myself, clear it up and plant it, and show my colored neighbors how such work should be done; will give them work as I have

occasion, look after them in all needful ways, and be a kind father to them.”¹⁴¹ It’s a speech filled with bluster and condescending paternalism: after all, every report from Essex and Franklin counties mentions triumphs, hope, and progress along with the setbacks, and there was little sense that the black Pioneers needed a master in their midst.

But Brown was used to unquestioned deference, and so he positioned himself as the patriarch of the Adirondacks.¹⁴² Yet to his father, Owen, he betrayed another reason for choosing to head north: “There are a number of good colored families on the ground; most of whom I visited. I can think of no place where I think I would sooner go; *all things considered* than to live with these poor despised Africans to try, and encourage them; and to show them a little as far as I am capable how to manage.”¹⁴³ It’s plaintive, that emphasized note, “*all things considered*,” and I think Brown was desperate. And so, even as he positioned himself as a leader in Smith’s company, he cast himself as a willing, trained servant to the pioneers themselves. There had recently been some trouble in the Adirondacks, and there were allegations and counter-allegations of land fraud.¹⁴⁴ Brown knew this: he had visited the mountains in the fall of 1848, and soon after addressed a letter to would-be settlers:

I take this opportunity of saying to all of my colored friends in a few words, that I am an experienced Surveyor, and that I have followed that business both in the Northern, Western and Southern States, and that I have lately explored to some extent, those parts of the country in which are located the lands donated by Gerrit Smith Esq., and that they possess many very superior natural advantages.¹⁴⁵

In the spring of 1849, Brown moved his family of nine to North Elba, but not to the 244 acres that Smith had given Brown on credit—that land was still largely uncleared, and there was no home on it in which to live. So the Browns rented a smaller house from a man named Flanders, and from their new lodgings noticed “how fragrant the air was, filled with the perfume of the spruce, hemlock, and balsams.”¹⁴⁶ This rented house was really the only Adirondack home

that Brown ever knew, and the only extended period of time that he ever spent in the Wilderness was from 1849 until 1851, when he moved his family back to Ohio. But even during that two-year period, he was travelling throughout the East, defending himself in court against creditors, trying to buy time, and perhaps deploying his genius for promotion on the pioneers' behalf.¹⁴⁷ It was only occasionally that he had the freedom to survey, plant, harvest, or log.¹⁴⁸ In 1855, he once again moved his family back from Ohio to North Elba, into a partially finished farmhouse that had been built for him (it's the John Brown Farm site that one can still visit today); but Brown himself did not stay. Kansas was bleeding and he felt himself called to the conflict, called to commit the murders that galvanized his reputation as a person who was willing to purge the stain of slavery with blood. Brown's farm was enlarged in 1857, when a band of Massachusetts philanthropists raised \$1000 for his family, but Brown would only see the new land a handful of times before he left for Harper's Ferry in the summer of 1859.¹⁴⁹

And that was the extent of John Brown's Adirondack adventure.

His body, according to his dying wish, would be shipped back to North Elba after his execution, buried in ground that he had never spent much time on but cared enough about to spend eternity in. It is clear that Brown deeply loved the Adirondacks—in 1854, while he was in Ohio, he wrote “My own conviction, after again visiting Essex County...is that no place...offers so many inducements to me, or any of my family, as that section.... I never saw it look half so inviting before.”¹⁵⁰ And it's clear that the colony of pioneers meant a great deal to him: he constantly asked about them in his letters, or arranged provisions to be sent their way, and very much wanted the pioneers to succeed as farmers. But it's also clear to me that, though he wished the pioneers the best in raising their crops, he never really took their utopian agrarianism seriously.

What's not clear is how much John Brown meant to the colony—and I do think that Brown's biographers, in trying to make sense of why he went to the Adirondacks in the first place, significantly exaggerate the degree to which the pioneers were "his community," and he the community's head.¹⁵¹ It is significant that Brown is rarely mentioned in any of the letters or newspaper articles written by the pioneers themselves, and significant that he had no luck recruiting pioneers for his Kansas or Virginia raids. McCune Smith, far from seeing the colony as Brown's, feared that the black settlers "were a little too dependent upon Mr. Brown's meal bin."¹⁵² Brown, in McCune Smith's view, was a persuasive distraction: rather than fitting into the environmental and social project that was afoot, he sought to steal the movement's growth for his own scheme—one that, however ultimately successful, was a far cry from the radicalism that sought to reimagine the nation as a land of nonviolence.

Unwilling to conceive of the Adirondack colony on the terms of its founders, inhabitants, and supporters, unwilling to imagine himself a part of the horizontal project of mutual aid and environmentally driven social justice, Brown used the Adirondacks as a redoubt from which to martial the attention, blessings, and, perhaps most importantly, intellectual and financial support of the radical abolitionists, diverting the feeder stream from the commons to his own plot. Spurred on by Brown and the Fugitive Slave Act, Gerrit Smith found himself enthralled by the immediate possibilities of violence, so much so that he became one of the Secret Six who had foreknowledge—and, indeed, helped fund—the Harper's Ferry Raid; Frederick Douglass, too, knew what Brown was up to, and found himself bending in Brown's direction. Even James McCune Smith began to feel that savagery could be purifying.¹⁵³

Left stranded, most of the settlers slowly trickled back to their downstate homes. In the end, Brown was right: slavery would only be purged by blood, and no matter whether you think

Brown a martyr or a madman, he was certainly one of those rare characters, perhaps a world-historical figure in whom is embodied a historical flashpoint, a point of no return.

It's not fair, I realize, to pin the demise of the Adirondack venture on Brown, but I do think that Brown was the personification of its ultimate failure—indeed, of the failure of radical abolitionism as a whole: the turn to violence that girdled Timbuctoo, Blacksville, and Freeman's Home. It's all the more unfortunate because after the Compromise of 1850, after both mainstream political parties, Whigs and Democrats alike, had committed themselves to the protection and indeed extension of slavery, and, what's more, seemed to accept racism as implicitly integral to America; as the political rhetoric grew hotter and the real-life situation of African Americans grew more desperate; as Gerrit Smith and Frederick Douglass and James McCune Smith became convinced that Brown's way was the only possible way and began to lose interest in the Great Northern Wilderness; as radical abolitionists increasingly responded to the easy seductions of bloodshed; as violence increasingly came to be seen as a legitimate political tool and, especially after the war's end, a legitimate economic one; as Brown's critique of slavery—but not racism—reached its terrible crescendo in the exploding shells on the fields of Antietam, Shiloh, and The Wilderness and then, slavery ended by the thirteenth amendment in 1865, stammered to a stop; as social justice movements started to fracture along the lines of identity politics (women's rights and anti-racism advocates notoriously turned against each other in the post-war decades); as the free market came to be seen as the only real route to freedom, the costs be damned; as a share-cropper economy swapped iron chains for golden ones, the nation desperately needed the sort of broad-spectrum ecology of freedom that had flowered in the Adirondacks.¹⁵⁴

But by then only a few settlers remained.¹⁵⁵

10.

History has followed Brown's lead, selectively silencing undertones, counter-movements, dissonant passages.¹⁵⁶

How many books dedicated to Brown jam each university's library shelves?

How many to Timbuctoo, Blacksville, and Freeman's Home?

In 1869, W.H.H. Murray, one of the Adirondacks' early and most influential cheerleaders, paused to consider the wilderness that he so loved.

At Keeseville, if you wish, you can turn off to the left toward North Elba, and visit that historic grave in which the martyr of the nineteenth century sleeps, with a boulder of native granite for his tombstone, and the cloud-covered peaks of Whiteface and Marcy to the north and south, towering five thousand feet above his head. By all means stop here a day. It will better you to stand a few moments over John Brown's grave, to enter the house he built, to see the fields he and his heroic boys cleared, the fences they erected and others standing incomplete as they left them when they started for Harper's Ferry. What memories, if you are an American, will throng into your head as you stand beside that mound and traverse those fields! You will continue your journey a better man or purer woman from even so brief a visit to the grave of one whose name is and will ever be a synonyme [sic] of liberty and justice throughout the world.¹⁵⁷

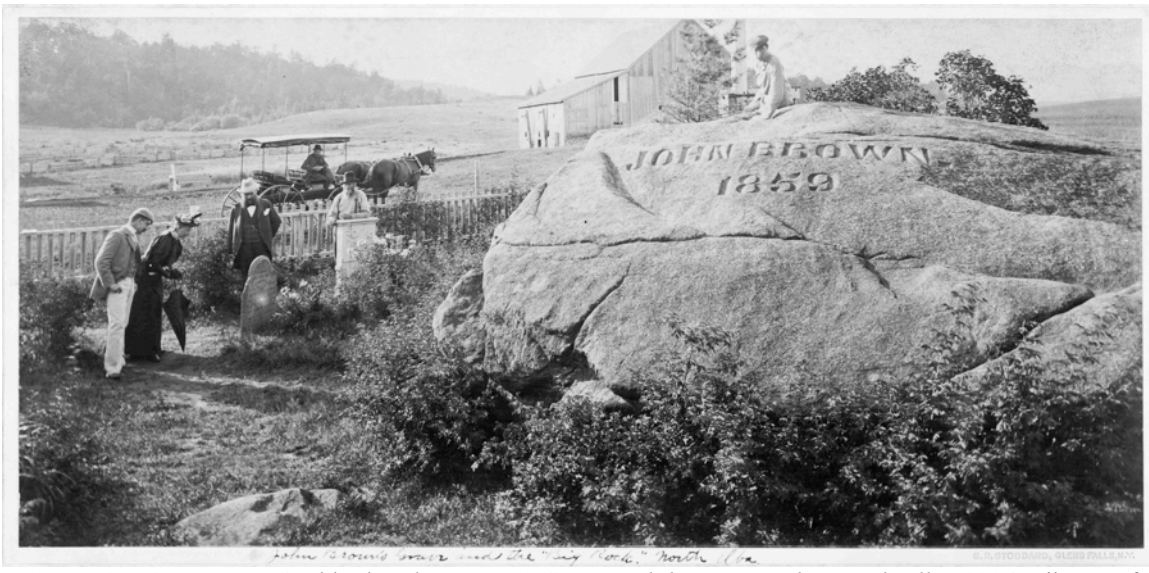


Figure 17: Seneca Ray Stoddard, *John Brown's Grave and the "Big Rock," North Elba*, 1896. Library of Congress.¹⁵⁸

11.

In a way that would seem strange in any other landscape, Brown was not so different from Agassiz, Emerson, and Stillman, all of them tourists sojourning in the Adirondacks, looking “to kill time and escape from the daily groove,” as Stillman put it.¹⁵⁹ Brown had found something ineffably, eternally enchanting in the mountain breezes, something that Stillman (who despite his breezy manner, wasn’t there just to kill time) sniffed on his first trip in the early 1850s. His insouciance feels out of place butted against the wide-eyed tone that otherwise trips its way through his Adirondack experiences: “I hoped here to find new subjects for art, spiritual freedom, and a closer contact with the spiritual world—something beyond the material existence.”¹⁶⁰ Indeed, it was Stillman who dreamt up Philosopher’s Camp: Agassiz, Emerson, and the others had been curious, but Stillman, the painter, felt something in the woods that he struggled to bind in words, something which, no matter how finely he fashioned his verbal net, slipped its bonds and ran back into the forest, inviting Stillman to follow:

In the solitude of the great Wilderness, where I have passed months at a time, generally alone, or with only my dog to keep me company, airy nothings became

sensible; and, in the silence of those nights in the forest, the whisperings of the night wind through the trees forced meanings on the expecting ear. I came to hear voices in the air, words so clearly spoken that even an incredulous mind could not ignore them.¹⁶¹

These spectral voices, Stillman connected to the spiritual, and I take him to mean that he found something authentic in the Adirondack Wilderness—his proper noun for the place. Authenticity: a word academics are trained to distrust. But Stillman's is not a simple authenticity, he's not arguing that unsullied-by-human-hand-wilderness is somehow True. Rather, he's a prospector assaying a twisting indefinite vein that would have been familiar to McCune Smith and the other black Adirondack farmers, though class and racial privilege seemed to intervene: there's something socially purifying about the wilderness.

Agassiz remarked one day...that he had always found in his Alpine experiences, when the company was living on terms of compulsory intimacy, that men found each other out quickly. And so we found it in the Adirondacks: disguises were soon dropped, and one saw the real character of his comrades as it was impossible to see them in society. Conventions faded out, masks became transparent, and for good or for ill the man stood naked before the questioning eye—pure personality.¹⁶²

It's painterly writing, concerned less with denotation than metaphor, than the guiding theme of transparency which links men to each other, peels off layers meant to mislead the eye, fades gaudy colors into the background, pierces the marketplace's tailcoat-and-top-hat and squinting monocular armor. There's the possibility of true connection, true society, true landscape—true harmony, as in Winslow Homer's 1894 Adirondack painting, *Old Friends*, in which color, age, grizzle, and the angle at which guide's and tree's trunks lean away, only to be united at the root (a painting which recalls Stillman's 1858 *Philosopher's Camp* in which Emerson, halfway between the groups of scientists on the left and the sportsmen on the right, confronts the tree at the very center of the painting, as if in communion) all of this conspires to muddle the distinction between human and nature.



Figure 18: Winslow Homer, *Old Friends*, 1894. Worcester Art Museum.

J.T. Headley, whose *The Adirondack; Or Life in the Woods* (1849)—was Thoreau aware of Headley? Did he borrow his subtitle for *Walden* from *The Adirondack*?—was an early and influential chronicle of Adirondack adventures, but his book is written in an odd form for a travel narrative. Neither a collection of stories, nor a field guide with sections on how to get there, what to wear, what to see, and which guides to employ, it's something much more intimate, an epistolary collection bound in leather, each letter addressed to “Dear H----,” H.J. Raymond, the man to whom Headley dedicated the entire book—a dedication that itself is strange, the sort of thing a jilted lover writes to his muse. “Though you failed to accompany me in my trip to the

Adirondack Region,” Headley wrote “yet I often thought of you in my long marches and lonely bivouacs.”¹⁶³ He was cut off from his friend, an individual isolated in the wilderness, and the Adirondacks felt strange and doubly lonesome. Headley told Dear H. that “it is lonely at first—after being accustomed to the din and struggle of Broadway and Wall street to sit as I now do, with a wide forest, climbing the steep mountains, to bound my vision, and the little clearing around me black with stumps.” Headley was in need of rebirth: the clangor, the flashing symbols and heated exchanges of New York had brought on an “attack of the brain” and forced him to flee the “haunts of men” for the woods.¹⁶⁴

And flee he did—right into the haunts of men. In a passage that Stillman would have recognized, Headley wrote:

In the woods, the mask that society compels one to wear is cast aside, and the restraints which the thousand eyes and reckless tongues about him fasten on the heart, are thrown off, and the soul rejoices in its liberty and again becomes a child in action. The ludicrous incident, the careless joke, the thrilling story, the eager chase, are all in place in the forest, and as harmless as the sports of the deer.... In wilderness there is no formality in the expression of one’s feelings.¹⁶⁵

As he sat in the forest clearing, wishing his friend was by his side, his head abuzz with local jokes and tall tales, Headley found himself refreshed by the natural scenery, certainly; but, I get the impression, that he found the implications, if not the actual facts, of Adirondack society even more rejuvenating. “Passing through a clearing on a side-hill...we came upon a *barn raising*, called here a ‘bee,’ because all the neighbors are invited to assist,” he wrote, incredulous that the buying-low-and-selling-high of his world coexisted with the forest’s mutual aid. A few days later, he summited Mt. Marcy, a mile higher than Wall Street, the tallest mountain in the state, and as he looked around him, as he took in the unobstructed view that stretched off in every point of the compass, as he saw the surrounding peaks that here and there peeled back the forest covering, letting the sun fall on their bald crowns, he found himself wonderfully disoriented:

“this is in New York...whose surface is laced with railroads and canals, and whose rivers are turbulent with steamboats and fringed with cities.” And he began to tease out the implications of the connection that he had drawn earlier. Reminiscing on a log drive that he had witnessed, Headley recognized the frenzied scramble: “So goes the world—New York has its objects of interest—the country village its—and the settler on the frontier his—each one is filled with the same anxieties, hopes, fears and wishes—overcome by the same discouragements and misfortunes, and working out the same fate; mad still with that mysterious soul and restless heat of his, greater than a king, and immortal as an angel, yet absorbed with straws and maddened or thrown into raptures by a little glittering dust.”¹⁶⁶

Here in the Great Northern Wilderness, surrounded by what he thought of as simple rustics—Headley could never quite make up his mind whether the backwoodsmen were to be idealized as noble yeoman or sneered at as unsophisticated hicks—he found himself making social critiques that, for all their many differences, wouldn’t have been totally foreign over in Timbuctoo. His attack on the brain was brought on by being “cheated, exasperated, slandered, and mortified,” back in the city, surrounded by sharpers on the lookout for profit. He was sick from being taken advantage of, but here in the woods he bore witness to something new. To Dear H. he poured out his thoughts, almost babbling in effusion:

I love nature and all things as God has made them. I love the freedom of the wilderness and the absence of conventional forms there. I love the long stretch through the forest on foot, and the thrilling, glorious prospect from some hoary mountain top. I love it, and I know it is better for me than the thronged city, aye, better for soul and body both. How is it that even good men have come to think so little of nature, as if to love her and seek her haunts and companionship were a waste of time...? A single tree standing alone, and waving all day long its green crown in the summer wind, is to me fuller of meaning and instruction than the crowded mart or gorgeously built town.

We might think of all this as an overly enthusiastic Romantic rhetoric that empties landscapes of inhabitants, but that's a pretty blurred reading of the text: behind everything that Headley writes, behind his newly found love of solitude, behind wilderness freedom always stands society. It's a society freed of "conventional forms," and though he idealizes—and I think identifies with—the single tree, it's the forest that gives that tree meaning, a forest abuzz with activity: "You have no conception of the quantity of lumber that is taken every winter from some part of this vast plateau to Albany. A thousand people will be in these woods, where, in the summer there is not a living being."¹⁶⁷

Indeed, this is one of the most surprising things about the Great Northern Wilderness: almost every travel narrative that I've sauntered through the woods with points here and there, begging me to consider the trees and mountains and rivers, but also the towns and industries and workers and settlements. Beginning with C.F. Hoffman's *Wild Scenes in Forest and Prairie* (1839), I've been treated to verbal images of a formerly abandoned farm, "if so neglected a tract could be thus characterized," of one hundred cleared acres, of laborers from a nearby town harvesting hay and fixing fences; of the valley between Henderson and Sanford lakes with its farmhouses and fields, soon to be the site of "M'Intyre," a town built to exploit the iron lying just beneath the forest's roots.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, the region was rich in ore: mining had been occurring in the Adirondacks since at least the mid-eighteenth century, and part of the reason that state geologist Ebenezer Emmons came to the wilderness was to pinpoint the most promising beds.¹⁶⁹ He did this, and he wrote up his report with the sort of spin guaranteed to light up an investor's eyes, alleging that "there is no limit to the amount and quality of raw material," but he paused along the way, and took time to marvel at great length over the Adirondack Pass, a natural feature that served no economic function—save tourism—but nonetheless captivated the hard-bitten man of

science: “In this country there is no object of the kind on a scale so vast and imposing as this. We look upon the Falls of Niagara with awe, and a feeling of our insignificance; but much more are we impressed with the great and the sublime, in the view of the simple naked rocks of the Adirondack Pass.”¹⁷⁰ Charles Lanman—the author and painter who trained in the Hudson River School with Asher B. Durand—published an account of his travels through the Adirondacks in 1856, constantly referring to the wilderness he found, and the timber cruisers, settlers, sports, farmers, hunters, surveyors, Irishmen, and Indians whom he met on the roads criss-crossing the region. He writes of the “embryo city of Tahawus, where we found a log house and an unfinished saw mill,” Hoffman’s now-developed McIntyre Iron Works, which employed 150 laborers, and a steel blast furnace.¹⁷¹ S.H. Hammond’s *Wild Northern Scenes* (1857) mentions the inns and innkeepers, the guides and loggers, lakes that have been dammed for the spring log drive, Indians and trappers.¹⁷² After the Civil War, *The Opening of the Adirondacks* (1865), a booster piece for Thomas C. Durant’s Adirondack Railroad—it was a side project that he pursued when he wasn’t busy working with the Union Pacific on the Transcontinental Railroad—described “The Wilderness of Northern New York” as “millions of acres, hundreds of miles of wilderness, here stretching away in the distance, there sinking into deep and broad valleys, and there swelling up the sides of hills and mountains which it clothes to the very summits,” a wilderness sheltering the Rossie, Robinson, Ross, and Jepson lead mines; and the Penfield, Cragharbor, Cheever, Sanford, Barnum, Hale’s, and Everett ore beds and iron mines—iron from which had won a gold medal at the London World’s Fair.¹⁷³ H. Perry Smith’s silly *The Modern Babes in the Woods* (1872) also pauses in amazement to contemplate the almost sublime fact of wild iron: “In the middle of the wilderness...are mines yielding 75 per cent. of pure metal and producing steel equal to the best made from Swedish or Russian ores.”¹⁷⁴ Seneca Ray

Stoddard's *The Adirondacks Illustrated* (1881) lists 146 different places to find a room "from the well-appointed hotel on the border to the rude log-house and open camp of the interior." Alongside these were twine, wire, and iron factories; the Ausable Horse-Nail company, and a nail-rod works lower down the Ausable river.¹⁷⁵ Throughout the nineteenth century, there were more than two hundred mining operations at work in the region; during the Civil War, the metal gracing the ironclad hull of the Confederacy's *Monitor* came from the Adirondacks, as did the spun-wire cables supporting the Brooklyn Bridge.¹⁷⁶

Buzzing saws and chuffing blast furnaces, the dinner bell and the reverberant jolt of pick against granite, the careful sound of earth being turned over and the instant snap of a trap's iron jaws, a polyglot chorus of languages and accents: but perhaps the most constant industrial sound in the Great Northern Wilderness was the report of an axe sinking precisely into trunk, and then the long, tearing crash. In fact, the Adirondacks were one of the prime lumber frontiers of the nineteenth-century, complete with innovations that changed the industry: Israel Johnson invented a new type of saw that turned raw logs into lumber far more quickly than the older methods.¹⁷⁷ The log drive was an Adirondack invention, too, and the multinational corporation that we now know as International Paper got its start skidding logs out of the Great Northern Wilderness. All of this helped to drive New York to the number one spot in terms of lumber-producing states by 1850, when over two thousand mills floated vast quantities of white pine, red spruce, and especially hemlock, out of the mountains. By 1870, more than a million logs a year were being cut from the mountains' sides.¹⁷⁸

You can't sneak a million logs a year past an unsuspecting public, and not a single Adirondack narrative goes by without mentioning forestry, or the sound of the axe. Sometimes

loggers are seen as romantic, hearty pioneers, vital and manly, struggling in, against, a sublime Nature.

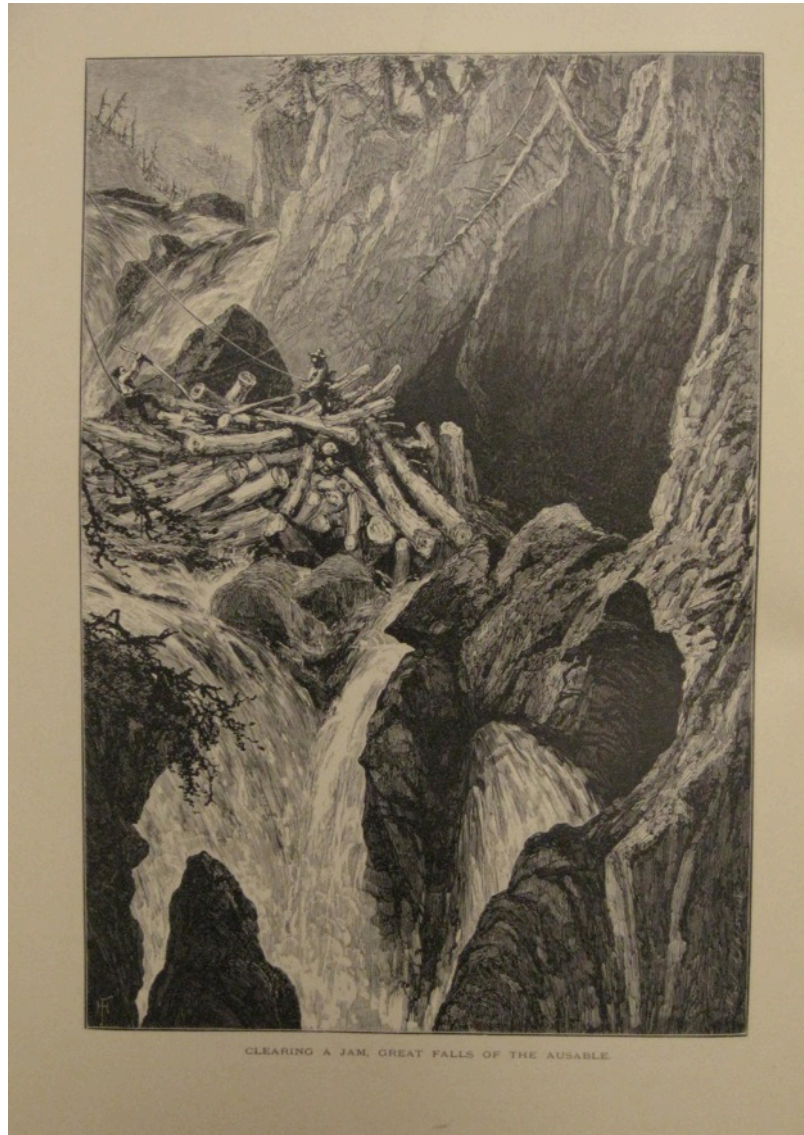


Figure 19: Harry Fenn, "Clearing a Jam, Great Falls of the Ausable," in *Picturesque America*. 1872.¹⁷⁹

Sometimes they're seen as a rapacious pestilence, afflicting the landscape's health, as when W.H.H. Murray equates deforestation with slash fires, erosion, choked streams, and most importantly a death-like smell that replaces the balsam and pine.¹⁸⁰ And sometimes logging is

seen ambiguously, as both manly and character building, but potentially unsettling when systematically applied indiscriminately.¹⁸¹

All of this, in the Adirondacks, which begs the question: where's the celebration of virginal land, untouched by human (or at least white) hands? Where's the understanding, as William Cronon has so provocatively and influentially put it in "The Trouble with Wilderness" (1995)—an essay that has marked the emergence of a new wilderness paradigm in environmental history and ecocriticism—that "wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural," the so-called Received Wilderness Idea that holds that "the place where we are is the place where nature is not?" I've read Cronon's "The Trouble with Wilderness" dozens of times, taught it consistently over the past ten years, and have pages of notes and reactions that I add to every time I come back to it. It's a brilliant essay. Recently, though, I've been growing more convinced that its epochal contribution—wilderness is a socially constructed, contested thing always in the process of definition—gets swamped in an overly simplified delight in historicizing with a hammer, in smashing old idols, in declaring wilderness unfit, perhaps even dangerous. "If by definition," Cronon writes, "wilderness leaves no place for human beings, save perhaps as contemplative sojourners enjoying their leisurely reverie in God's natural cathedral—then also by definition it can offer no solution to the environmental and other problems that confront us."¹⁸²

The ease with which the Received Wilderness Idea has been toppled and a new, post-wilderness paradigm erected, has led me to suspect the very coherence of the Idea itself—were nineteenth-century Americans really that oblivious?—and many historians seem to ignore the possibility that the Received Wilderness Idea (received by whom? when? how?) could very well have been garbled in its transmission, that it could bear little resemblance to what was originally

broadcast, as in a *longue dureé* game of telephone. Has wilderness really remained one static, monolithic idea from the 1840s—the typical era in which Cronon and others date the birth of the Received Wilderness Idea—to the late-twentieth century? Isn't it a bit, well, unhistorical, to suggest that it has?

And so if wilderness, at least the Great Northern Wilderness, bucks Cronon's definition, if some nineteenth-century wildernesses pretty explicitly *were* a home for human beings and their factories, sawmills, farms, traplines, and mines, then perhaps some wilderness ideas *can* begin to offer solutions for a wide range of other environmental problems. Perhaps many nineteenth-century wildernesses, like Thomas Cole's *Schroon Lake* (ca. 1846), were a hybrid of nature and culture, where improvement meant picturesque blending and restraint, where life—human and sylvan—flourished, and green shoots sprung from tree stumps.



Figure 20: Thomas Cole, *Schroon Lake*, ca. 1846. Adirondack Museum.

Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century, the Adirondacks were one of the preeminent wilderness sites where locals met tourists, industry met the wilds, aesthetics met the material world, and people met each other. It was the Great Northern Wilderness, in many ways, that taught Americans about wilderness.¹⁸³ Though a modern, simplified version of wilderness as non-human would find its way onto many pages of many books and wind up as one of the predominant narratives seeking to make sense of the north woods, it is not the only narrative, nor even the most widespread.¹⁸⁴ Instead, wilderness as a foil, as critique—at times bordering on a radical anticapitalism, though more often as a gentler reformist spirit—wilderness as the preeminent landscape of social connectivity, wilderness as health; in short, wilderness as a place *for* humans: these are the dominant ways of understanding the mountains and lake and breezes blowing through Adirondack balsam forests.¹⁸⁵

We see this early on, in 1846, when Headley wrote, “How often we speak of the *solitude* of the forest, meaning by that, the contrast its stillness presents to the hum and motion of busy life. When you first step from the crowded city into the centre of a vast wilderness, the absence of the bustle and activity you have been accustomed to makes you at first believe there is no sound, no motion here...yet these solitudes are full of sound, aye, of rare music, too.”¹⁸⁶ It’s no contradiction or deflection to note that the woods are different, physically, spatially, ecologically, than Wall Street, that positioned in opposition to the city, wilderness can offer a comparative solitude—a potentially loaded word for Headley—that regenerates one’s humanity by reestablishing connection. One may, Headley and others suggest, have to flee in order to remain part of the whole, and fleeing doesn’t have to be a retreat, therapy doesn’t have to treat the symptoms, only. Headley, the urban sophisticate, discovered that “if one is not entirely spoiled,

he soon attunes himself to the harmony of nature, and a new life is born within him.” It’s a Thoreauvian note sounded only a few years after the transcendentalist’s two-year sojourn in the woods, and it continues, mixed with a bit of Gerrit Smith-esque critique of private property: “The laws of Nature and Heaven are such that he who accumulates to live a life of idleness is made as miserable as the man he impoverishes in order to do it.”¹⁸⁷

Eleven years later, S.H. Hammond would publish one of the most complicated works on the Adirondacks that I have ever wandered into—it’s a book too often dismissed in a few sentences, and it deserves more, if only because of the great care taken in its writing, and the great pleasure that comes from reading good prose.¹⁸⁸ Hammond was a successful Albany journalist, had the privilege of wealth, commanded the ear of influence, and saw the Adirondacks as “my settled summer resort.”¹⁸⁹ We can crucify him for that, make sure to emphasize that he was out of touch, elite, a capitalist stooge. But his “Introductory” is powerfully more, a complicated invocation that is as literary and metaphorical as it is denotative reportage:

There is a broad sweep of country lying between the St. Lawrence and Lake Champlain, which civilization with its improvements and its rush of progress has not yet invaded. It is mountainous, rocky, and for all agricultural purposes sterile and unproductive. It is covered with dense forests, and inhabited by the same wild things, save the red man alone, that were here thousands of years ago.¹⁹⁰

It’s stereotypical stuff, initially: a glossy panorama of a place empty and beautiful, and the passing nod to the “red man” serves only to drive home the lonesome sublime. There’s no doubt that Hammond is helping to create a wilderness myth—virgin territory, invading civilization—even as a wilderness myth is guiding his pen. But very quickly, Hammond starts shifting his imagined geography, physically connecting it to inhabited spaces, along water courses understood as the lifeblood of a nation’s economy, implicitly linking the health of the woods to “the system,” an organism that might refer to the human body, the body politic, or both:

It is a high region, from which numerous rivers take their rise to wander away...some to Ontario, some to the St. Lawrence, some to Champlain, and some to seek the ocean, through the valley of the Hudson. The air of this mountain region in the summer is of the purest, loaded always with the freshness and the pleasant odors of the forest. It gives strength to the system, weakened by labor or reduced by the corrupted and debilitating atmosphere of our cities. It gives elasticity and buoyancy to the mind depressed by continued toil, or the cares and anxieties of business, and makes the blood course through the veins with renewed vigor and recuperated vitality.¹⁹¹

The living wilderness turns into an organic funhouse of mirrors, pathetic fallacies of seeking rivers and gift-giving woods harmonizing with brains described as lithe saplings—elastic and buoyant—and blood as purling streams. And so when his pen trips out that sentence—“I have come to regard these mountains, these lakes and streams, these old forests, and all this wild region, as my settled summer resort”—it’s with something much more complicated than an outsider’s sense of entitlement. For Hammond, he was settling, coming home, home to a place where “I can take off the armour which one is compelled to wear, and remove the watch which one must set over himself...because I can whistle, sing, shout hurrah and be jolly.”¹⁹²

Like Headley, who wrote that “there is one kind of forest music I love best of all—it is the sound of wind amid the trees,” sound is key to Hammond’s experience of the wilderness, and he contrasts “the clank of machinery, the rumbling of carriages, the roar of the escape pipe; the scream of the steam whistle; the tramp, tramp of moving thousands on the stone sidewalk,” with the “clear and musical and shrill” call of the loon, the “partridge drumming upon his log,” the raccoon, the owl’s “almost human haloo”—harmonizing, perhaps, with his own hurrah—the catbird, and brown thrush, and chervink, and chickadee, and wood robin, and blue-jay, and wood sparrow, and “a hundred other nameless birds that live and build their nests and sing among these old woods.”¹⁹³ On every level, wilderness is a spatial foil to the city: it’s expansive, rather

than cramped; free rather than constrained; filled with song rather than noise; wild because it's forested rather than civilized and choked with concrete.

Hammond's is an idealized wilderness, and it lets him escape from the city for the tonic that he so needed; but more importantly, in casting the wilderness as a perfect foil for civilization, it allows Hammond to take a new look at the place from which he came and to which he will willingly return when his holiday ends. Wilderness helps to define civilization for Hammond—and he doesn't like what he sees standing in the forest's shade: an urban modernity that has increasingly sought alienation for the sake of profit. Wilderness provides the vantage-point from which Hammond can ask the inconvenient, countermodern question whether or not all the pavement, and onward rush, and endless counting of coin is worth it.¹⁹⁴ “ ‘Pshaw,’” Hammond writes, from a fictional second-person vantage point meant to address, indeed to assault, the reader, “ ‘You have spoiled, with your wordliness, your greed for progress, your thirst for gain, a pleasant fancy, a glorious dream, as if everything in the heavens, on the earth or in the waters, were to be measured by the dollar and cent standard, and unless reducible to a representative moneyed value, to be thrown, as utterly worthless, away.’”¹⁹⁵ It's a note that Hammond sounds at measured intervals throughout the text, counterposed to the more standard reportage of hunting and fishing trips—and yet, he's never as explicitly radical as Thoreau. He stages his exploration of modernity and its implications as a literary conversation with his companions, and poses his friend Spalding, the booster for Progress—“ ‘The scream of the steam-whistle has succeeded the old stage-horn, and the iron horse taken the place of those of flesh and blood. Change is written in great glowing letters upon everything...Forward! Forward! is the word’”—against its discontented sojourner, the Doctor—“ ‘I sometimes think that it is no great thing after all to be human.... But great and glorious and proud as [reason, knowledge, and

wisdom] are, they have their balances of evil. They bring with them no contentment, no repose, while they heap upon us boundless necessities and limitless wants. We are hurried through life too rapidly for the enjoyment of the present, and the good we see in prospect is never attained.”¹⁹⁶

The contest between Spalding and the Doctor concludes with Spalding laying bare the utopian, always unproven faith of modernity: “ ‘Everywhere, in all the departments of science, in every branch of the arts, improvement, progress has been going on with a sublimity of achievement unknown in any age of the past.... There is hope for the world in all this mighty progress.... Who will venture to assert where the limit to this progress may be found?’ ”¹⁹⁷ The sun will always dawn over a landscape newer, and therefore better than the one it set on, the promise of a yet-to-be-realized golden age just over the western horizon, if only we can leverage more—more capital, more power, more steam, more iron—always more. But the Doctor, the arbiter of health, has the final word:

The good time of which you speak...when there shall be no infirmity of age, no growing old, save in years; when there shall be no wasting by disease...will never come... The excesses of the world are a much more fruitful source of disease and death than the attritions of age. There is a constant struggle of nature to build up and beautify, to strengthen and recuperate, against the result of human excesses.... The outrages perpetrated upon nature by the conventionalities of the world alone, would be an insurmountable barrier to the realization of your idea.... It is a part of our civilization, an offshoot of the very progress of which you speak, a sort of necessity in practical results, at least, that men *shall* so live as to wage war against nature, and against themselves; that they shall hurry themselves, or be hurried by inevitable circumstances, into the grave at the earliest possible moment.... You will find that as science closes up one avenue to the grave, men will force a way to it through another.¹⁹⁸

Or almost the final word. I think that Hammond looked down at his page, at what he had written, and blanched.

The wood madness was upon him, and the Great Northern Wilderness had laid bare the rotten core at the heart of the Great Western Civilization. We can say that industrial capitalism produces an endless stream of “goods.” But we can also say that, at the very same time, it produces endless desire, and therefore endless scarcity, and that the manufactured excess of scarcity justifies continual war “against nature, and against [humans] themselves.”

But Hammond was a moderate, unwilling to let his own internal drummer set a loping beat as eccentric as Thoreau’s, and so, in the end, he swallowed his critique, has Spalding and the Doctor choke down the tepid pap of religious conviction that everything will be better in the afterlife, and that this one, here in the cities and wildernesses, is only a transitory phase. We need not worry, he seems too quick to reassure us, everything will be alright in the end...but if we do feel overburdened by the cares of urban life, the woods, the mad woods await.¹⁹⁹

There is something conventional in Hammond’s equation of the Adirondacks with health—but we shouldn’t let convention blunt critique: industrialized landscapes were, *are*, too often unhealthy. In the mid-nineteenth century, tourists predominantly conceived of the Adirondacks as a place to hunt and fish and camp and hike, that is, as a place for manly, invigorating rough play, the sort of play that could not longer take place in the built-up city.

But by the 1860s, tourist pressure was beginning to make what was only recently Wild Unsettled Country feel civilized. It was during the 1860s, and especially the 1870s that hotels started colonizing the Great Northern Wilderness, first a few around the prominent lakes, and then increasingly in the backwoods. By 1876 twenty hotels hunched around Lake George alone, and in the 1880s, fueled in part by Durant’s Adirondack Railroad, the great camp phenomenon was in full bloom: dozens of elaborate, multiple-storied “rustic” structures, complete with ballrooms and fine china, went up in the woods, and the region became the pleasure ground for

those titans of industry, the Morgans, Vanderbilts, and Huntingtons. The middling classes, too, found inns and camps a-plenty, and by the 1880s, many wilderness lovers were worrying that the Adirondacks were proving *too* popular: lakes were crowded, trails eroded, fish and game depleted, and people, people everywhere.²⁰⁰

Indeed, by the time H. Perry Smith published his jejune *The Modern Babes in the Wood* in 1872, the Adirondacks were already starting to feel cramped. Smith and his friends have trouble locating a boat when they need one: all the good barks have already been snatched up, and when they finally succeed in locating a suitable craft, they turn it into a sort of party boat. It seems like he and his friends spend most of their time visiting other parties, getting drunk, and cracking penis jokes. They're in the woods for a good time, for the freedom to be silly and sodden and maybe catch a few fish, and there's not much of the romantic soul-searching that one finds in Hammond's *Wild Northern Scenes*. As I read Smith's account in the stillness of the American Antiquarian Society, I was instantly reminded of a night I once spent in the Adirondacks within earshot of a frat-house outing trip, and I can picture the scene.²⁰¹

But even frat boys sometimes find truth in their drink, and in the middle of Smith's tale—completely out of nowhere, apropos to nothing—leaps a social critique that would be right at home swimming in Gerrit Smith's radical waters:

O, fly to the woods...ye brain-racked, business-wearied, world-driven victims. Leave the haunts of the "money-changers"—leave the scenes where too often a little uncertain wealth, which can bring nothing but the food you eat, (and can't digest), with garments to cover your nakedness, seems of more value than friends, honor, and even eternal welfare; where man for a little perishable earthly glory and domination, turns a deaf ear to the desolate from every quarter, robs his fellow, bargains away the earthly and perchance the everlasting happiness of his own flesh and blood, drives all charity from his heart, and goes headlong to a grave by the side of a beggar. Leave a world where happiness is ever sought and seldom found, because the struggling, striving, toiling mass, seek the *ignus fatuus* by the poor glimmer of gold, rather than by the bright light of a clear conscience, and fly to the wilderness.²⁰²

It's too easy to assume that the rare flower of wilderness as critique was trampled under the soles of well-heeled financiers and a scrambling middle class, too easy to assume that by the waning decades of the nineteenth century, any incipient radicalism had been gentrified into a species of consumption, merely.

I often think that some of the most potentially far-reaching, efficacious commitments come in conventional, respectable packages. Take community supported agriculture in the twenty-first century, for instance: at least around Ithaca, CSAs are *the* place where fashionable, liberal, upper-middle-class white folks get their vegetables, and so it's also fashionable for liberal, upper-middle-class white folks to poke ironic fun at the whole CSA movement. But food is one of our most basic connections to the environment, and supporting local farmers has tangible economic, social, spatial, and environmental implications that parallel the goals of many radical social reformers. It's not *just* trendy consumption; gentility and privilege do not automatically equate to exploitation.

In fact, I think it's just here, at the intersection of gentility and reform, that the Great Northern Wilderness has had some of its most lasting effects.

In 1877, a young newspaper clerk from New York City came down with a nasty cough, one that soon devolved into the nineteenth century's most feared and storied malady: tuberculosis.²⁰³ The downward slide to total consumption was swift, and his doctor, digging deep into his satchel, prescribed the one remedy remaining: wilderness.²⁰⁴ In June—blackfly season, possibly the worst time to take off on an Adirondack trip—the invalid, whose “wasted body and bloodless face afforded reason enough for the sturdy guides to shake their heads ominously,” betook himself to the woods to fill himself full of the balsam air.²⁰⁵

The Adirondacks had been prescribed as a medicine of last resort for consumption since W.H.H. Murray's *Adventures in the Wilderness* (1869) had hit the bookstalls. There's a short passage, near the beginning, where Murray writes, "the spruce, hemlock, balsam, and pine, which largely compose this wilderness, yield upon the air...all their curative qualities." Murray then went on to recount a tale of a dying man who was laid on a bier of cedar, pine and balsam boughs, placed in the bottom of a boat, and rowed around one of the Adirondack's many lakes. He hung in this liminal state—neither here nor there, lying on trees, floating on the water, gazing at the sky—strung between death and life until the styptic air dried the tubercles from his lungs.²⁰⁶ Then, in 1873, Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau left for the Adirondacks to die, hoping against hope that a trip north would buy him time. When he ended up cured of his TB, he devoted the rest of his life to administering the curative Adirondack air to sickly patients, and the mountains became a haven of pulmonary health.²⁰⁷

So when the newspaper clerk arrived, he was part of a diseased flood desperately seeking purification. He found it. By the middle of December, the wasted consumptive was, quite literally, a different person: "The thermometer is close to zero. The air is crisp and cold. It might freeze your dainty city ears, but it is nothing to the hardy backwoodsman. Nothing to the young man." The former clerk witnessed a total transformation, both in body—from effete city-dweller to manly backwoodsman—and in spirit, for the breath of life breezing through pine boughs blew into his lungs, reanimating, reconstituting, reforming mind and matter alike. The young man maintained his gentility—camping out in the wilderness was not necessarily all about "salt pork, rubber blankets, a bed of hemlock boughs, and much physical discomfort," but could also involve "all the comforts, and nearly all the luxuries that he might enjoy in his city home," a bed with sheets and "proper night garments," an ice-house, a "good table with a menu embracing

anything you want, from bouillon to ice-cream,” daily mail, wine, beer, and cigars—while gaining a cutting edge of cultural criticism.²⁰⁸

The key to the wilderness cure was good living, and though the wilderness experience “need entail no hardship, no privation,” the clerk offered an alternative good life that stood at odds to the scramble for wealth. It began with that pine-tinged air. But there was something about the land, too: vast swaths of it were in private hands, and indeed, the young clerk was a squatter during his wilderness sojourn. No matter: in the Adirondacks even private property meant something different—so long as the squatter did no harm, so long as he camped out with a sense of usufruct, leaving the area as healthy and beautiful as he found it, he was welcome. Finally, the clerk comes up with a holistic vision of health, one that unites space, climate, and economics, and leads to a surprising conclusion. “There is no special atmosphere manufactured for house use,” he writes, meaning that we cannot invent ourselves out of pollution. If we befoul the air out-of-doors, then whatever makes its way in through door or window will become even more putrescent. “With no noxious odors, no defective drains or gas-pipes, no miserable furnaces, no double windows to shut out the oxygen,” the wilderness is quite simply a better place to live, a place that allows for life, and the young clerk drives the point home by contrasting dead, concrete urban artifacts—odors, drains, gas pipes, furnaces, windows—with their vivacious country cousins: “cheery wood fires, open chimney-places, and a surrounding atmosphere of absolute purity.”²⁰⁹

This is what our clerk, a reborn Bartelby, found: there’s no reason that Progress must come at the cost of breathing poison, of destroying body and mind. Wilderness is a cure for consumption.

12.

It's always worth it, when in the wilderness, to stop for a while and listen.

In fact, it happens that sound is one of the key attributes of the nineteenth-century Adirondack wilderness: McCune Smith's and Frederick Douglass's woods ringing with the sound of black axe strokes. Headley's favorite music, "the sound of wind amid the trees." Stillman and his "whispering of the night wind through the trees." Lanman and his anger that the supposedly native name of the state's highest mountain, softly euphonious Tahawus, was replaced with that of a vulgar politician, gratingly dry Marcy: "A pretty idea, indeed, to scatter to the winds the ancient poetry of the poor Indian, and perpetuate in its place the name of a living politician." Hammond's anguished question, "where shall we go to find the woods, the wild things, the old forests, and hear the sounds which belong to nature in its primeval state?" Poet Alfred B. Street's therapeutic breezes: "The soft Southwest says, Take thy rest/To-day upon nature's kindly breast!" W.H.H. Murray's dogma-bending faith: "So with God: in the silence of the woods the soul apprehends him instinctively. He is everywhere. In the fir and pine, which, like the tree of life, shed their leaves every month, and are forever green."²¹⁰

Spend a moment on the odor, too: Homer Sweet's wilderness camp and its bark roof "of spruce, peeled from the trunks,/And gives balsamic odors to the air." Or Cook's anti-consumptive spaces where "The proximity of pine and balsam trees is a most desirable thing." Or Perry and his group of Modern Babes in the Woods who eagerly "snuffed the scented breezes."²¹¹

Sound and smell: it's not just the absence of mechanical noise or the fetid stink of cities, it's the presence of something else that makes a place a wilderness: the presence of trees. This is

what made the Great Northern Wilderness a wilderness: woods, vast and unbroken and unsettled and untouched.

It's especially here, though, that our current scholarly map, "The Trouble with Wilderness" paradigm, leads us astray: unbroken and unsettled and untouched are three forbidden words, to be handled ironically with scare quotes, deconstructed, and shown to be semantically adrift. Though it's not difficult to find Adirondack images celebrating what many scholars now consider to be the true ideological roots of wilderness, it's also not difficult to find dozens of images that simply don't fit the Received Wilderness Idea. From Asher B. Durand's harmonious clearing softly fading into the beckoning woods in *Hurricane Mountain* (1848), to the many unknown lithographers and printers who peppered tourist manuals with images of the wilderness, clearings and people are everywhere in the unbroken Adirondack woods.



Figure 21: Asher B. Durand, *Hurricane Mountain*, 1848. Johnson Museum, Cornell University.

Somewhere lost in the static separating past and present is a complicated rendering of wilderness that is out of phase with much of the current scholarly understanding. Wilderness, at least in the Great Northern Wilderness, was materially definite: it meant wooded, unbrokenly wooded, but unbroken didn't mean that there were no clearings. It just meant that the clearings were periodic pauses in an otherwise unbroken sylvan narrative.



Figure 22: “View on Raquette Lake,” from *The Opening of the Adirondacks*, 1865.²¹²

Unsettled, like unbroken, had a different meaning in the nineteenth century than empty: unsettled meant land that was not farmed, that was not cleared, that was forested.²¹³ And untouched, was a close synonym of unsettled. This untouched land felt different to a citified human body: it

sounded different, smelled different. In an age where human settlement, where clearing the forests was understood to produce dangerously pungent miasmas, the land was healthy for humans *because* it was filled with trees.²¹⁴

It's one of the oldest scholarly conventions in writing about wilderness to recognize that wilderness is a slippery word, that it's at once a noun, concrete, physical and material, but acts like an adjective, ideological and cultural.²¹⁵ And so the Adirondacks' material difference helped breed a cultural understanding of the Great Northern Wilderness that is likewise more complicated than we tend to think. Unfortunately, many of the most influential critiques of wilderness have tended to code difference as negative, as only a tool of exclusion, or have collapsed difference altogether and given the impression that trees are trees, whether they were planted by a squirrel in the wilds or by human hands in a suburban upper-middle-class backyard.²¹⁶ But many in the nineteenth-century understood that wild and urban lay on a continuum of difference, that each gave meaning to the other.²¹⁷ Again and again, travellers to the wilderness find themselves bridging the distance from city to woods: Emerson did it when he imagined the intercontinental telegraph; and Headley wrote, "how strange it seems to behold men thus occupied—living contentedly fifty miles from post office or village—and hear their inquiries about the war with Mexico."²¹⁸ It's another way of saying that the Great Northern Wilderness and New York City were connected to each other, not only through their similarities—both were sites of consumption, both helped reproduce certain cultural phenomena—but also through their differences. City visitors could not but help to think of the Big Apple, it seemed, when they were surrounded by deep forests. And just as the wilderness lacked some of the things that one could find in a city—fine art, theater, literature, post offices, villages—the city lacked all sorts of things that were woodland natives.

Noticing difference means that many nineteenth-century Adirondack tourists were emphatically *not* conceiving of the woods as empty, virginal, waiting to be penetrated by culture, but full: full of people, full of health, full of trees, full of animals, full of activity. It was full of wild. Difference wasn't a lack, it was just...different. If modern civilization had been disenchanted, the woods were yet a place where living things, some of them human, gathered, a place of mystery, which is another way of saying a place of potential. The wilderness was a place to go and encounter this mysterious fullness, to reconnect with a kind of presence that had been weeded out of the cultivated parts of the world, to realize that there were vast areas of industrialized life that were barren in comparison.²¹⁹ When African Americans and abolitionists, geologists and tourists came to the Great Northern Wilderness, they of course found critique, but they also found a positive social vision of what the world, their world, could be.

One of the things that I find so striking in reading through nineteenth-century accounts of the Adirondacks is how nearly universal it is to argue that in the woods people can let down their guard and truly connect with one another. It's a standard not only of the privileged white tourists like W.J. Stillman, S.H. Hammond, Charles Lanman, or J.T. Headley, but also of James McCune Smith, Jermain Wesley Loguen, and James H. Henderson. There's something that refuses to be defined, something mystical, something wild about living in the woods for a few weeks or months or years, something about living with trees that inverts the dominant cultural ideology: life is not about acquiring money or wealth or reifying one's social position, but gaining experience and happiness and neighborliness and breaking hierarchical bonds. It's about being grateful. About noticing. About health rather than consumption. About taking time, rather than being on the clock. It was in the wilderness where one could discover a common humanity that transcended race and class, a common humanity that could be used to reform one's home.

Reform: that's the key, the ever-changing, forming and reforming cultural canopy nourished by material tree roots. Wilderness was about learning how to live in a fruitful human and nature relationship, a certain kind of society, one that recognized and preserved the sympathetic ecological connections too often denied by the alienating space of the market or dismissed as externalities, merely. But it's a mistake to suppose that this was a didactic lesson, charted out on a blackboard, memorized and repeated. Wilderness was a journey continually in the unfolding, continually delighting with its surprising, wild twists and turns.²²⁰ Perhaps the lesson, in the end, is one of humility: we'll never know exactly what wilderness truly is, but in trying to define it we help to define ourselves, a lesson that makes for a good beginning, makes for a good life filled with the pleasures of observation and the imperative for mutual aid.²²¹

And for some, like James McCune Smith, wilderness was the last thing rooting them to an alienating, despairing world. George W. Sears, who was put to work in the cotton mills of central Massachusetts at the age of eight and who would later become one of the most influential outdoors authors of the late-nineteenth-century with his *Woodcraft* (1884), this Sears, who rejected his given name for the freedom of the pen-name Nessmuk, published a poem in 1887 called "From the Misanthrope":

I saw the emmets on this ragged earth
Each struggling for his grain of yellow sand;
I heard the hollow lie, and saw the dearth
Of justice, truth and honor in the land.

How could I mingle in the selfish throng
That grasped and struggled, bit, and stung, and lied.
I, who had heard the morning stars in song,—
What needs were mine this had satisfied?

And so we fell apart—the world and I."²²²

Yet, Nessmuck wasn't all misanthrope: his life-raft poems are meant as much for all those struggling in quiet desperation as they are his own salvation.

Even the frat boys of *The Modern Babes in the Woods* were far more savvy, and distressed, than I had at first given them credit for. The Babes is a reference to an old folk story, dating back to at least the sixteenth-century, known as either *The Babes in the Woods* or more commonly as *The Children in the Woods*, in which a young orphaned brother and sister are given to the care of a corrupt uncle. The children have inherited their parents' wealth, wealth that the uncle wants, and he hires two assassins to take the children into the woods and murder them. But one of the assassins has a shred of humanity left, and instead of killing the babes, stabs his accomplice to death, and then flees, promising to come back for the brother and sister. He never does, the brother and sister wander the wilderness for a while, before succumbing to starvation. The woods witness this all, and though they are powerless to stop the murderers, powerless to deflect the trajectory of ill-begotten profit, powerless, in the end, to keep the innocent alive, they ultimately provide a repose that human society has been unwilling to extend: only the woods—bareheaded, leafless in mourning—stoop over the children, protecting and sheltering their lifeless bodies, while robins cover the siblings with a funereal blanket of leaves.²²³

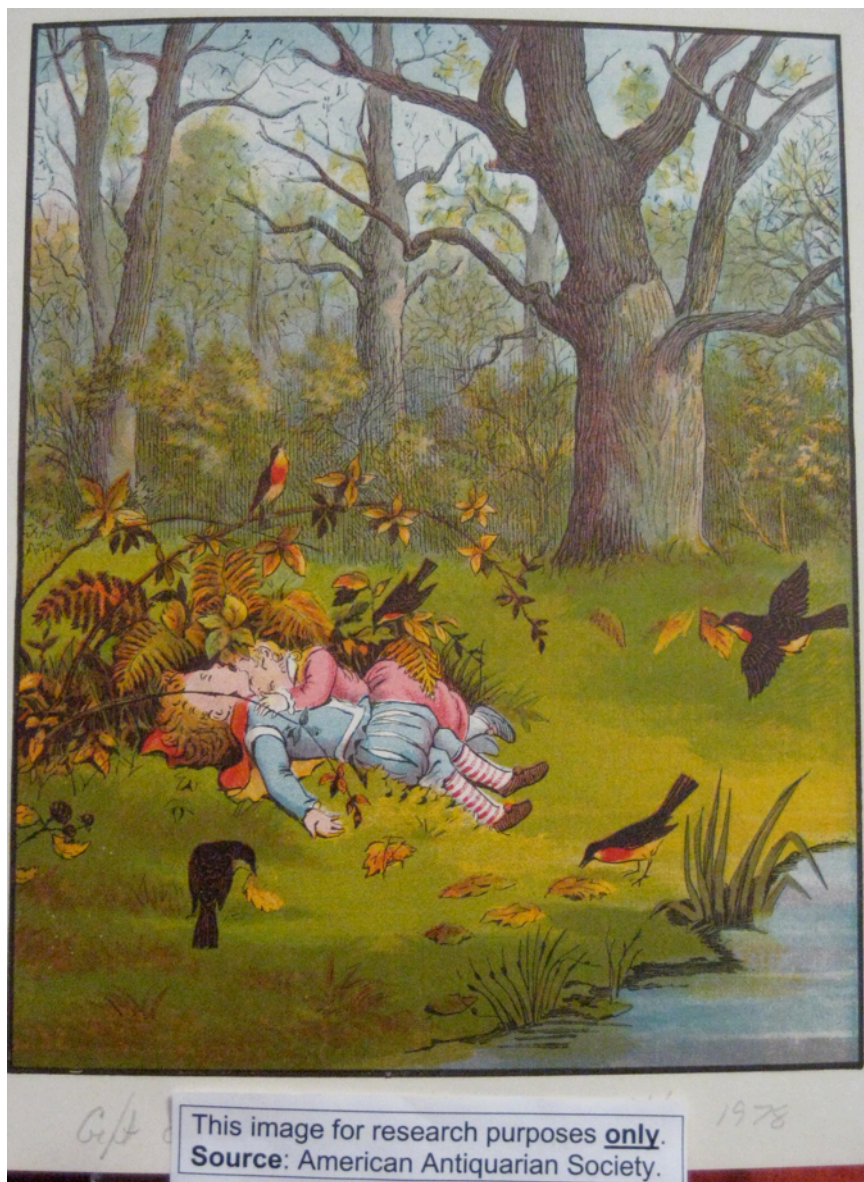


Figure 23: *The Babes in the Wood*, [1880-1882?]. Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.²²⁴

13.

I first set foot in the Adirondacks when I was 16, on July 4, 1996. My best friend had organized a backpacking trip for he and I and a third mutual friend (our parents had wisely felt

that, in case of emergency, three was safer than two in the wilderness), and we left from the Garden parking lot, in Keene Valley, not far from where James H. Henderson had given his letter for Henry Highland Garnet to the local postman, return address West Keene, Timbucto. We pioneers left our car, strapped on backpacks, and set off into our own Eden for a three-day venture up Mt. Marcy. Got soaked by rain, covered in black Adirondack mud, blistered, lectured by a backcountry ranger for camping in an off-limits spot. I fell in a river. But what I will remember for the rest of my life was scrambling up Marcy's sides on a trail that I seem to recollect the guidebook described as "a waterfall of stones," the balsam firs shrinking in size and growing closer together until they seemingly turned into lichens, until, for the first time in my life, I stood above tree line.

I found something in that view on the 5th of July that has kept me coming back ever since on foot, skis, snowshoes, bike, and with climbing rope in hand. It's something that's driven me around the country to tall mountains, narrow canyons, and deep woods, and it steered me to Banks's *Cloudsplitter*. Cloudsplitter, after all is the supposed English translation of Tahawus, our Marcy. Initially I picked up Banks's book because I thought it would be about hiking. This same ineffable something drew me to my initial round of Timbuctoo research in 2000, and again, in 2006, and back yet again in 2011 and 2012. Chasing this something eventually led to graduate school, where I discovered that, though I know parts of the Adirondacks intimately, though the pines and balsams have been witness to many watershed moments in my life—deep friendships forged and renewed, some of the starriest nights I have ever seen, my first run-in with cheap blended Canadian whiskey, early dates with my future wife, Talia, blown knees and lost toenails and struggling to stay warm when the mercury dropped to -10, a nearly fatal climbing

adventure—despite all this, it wasn't until a work-related research trip to the Adirondack Museum in 2011 that I realized the Adirondacks knew me much better than I knew them.

I think I discovered then, while at work in the Adirondacks, what it was that a 16-year-old me caught a glimpse of and has steered my life ever since. It was reading through James McCune Smith's letters, the *North Star*, and the recollections of other black pioneers, spending days immersed in Ebenezer Emmons's geological reports, S.H. Hammond's philosophical and sporting adventures, and Marc Cook's miraculous wilderness cure, that I recognized a familiar feeling and came to find a name for this something that keeps pulling me back to the Great Northern Wilderness. This something is the wild: the possibility for enchantment.

Of course, the Adirondacks are not and have never been an uncomplicated utopia. In my senior year of college, I mentored a wonderful, troubled 6th-grade boy at Moriah Central School, in Essex County, along the route that some black pioneers would have taken to find their lands. It was a beautiful area, but poor—indeed, upstate New York is one of the poorest regions of the state, and Essex and Franklin counties rate 49 and 56 out of 63 counties in terms of median income.²²⁵ My student and I talked about skateboarding, and playing in bands, and swapped punk rock mix tapes and generally had a fine time, but there was always a dark streak: I heard my fill of tales of neglect and alcoholism and hardship from him and his friends, tales of unsafe, unhappy homes here in the forever wild Adirondack wilderness. I once tried to turn the tide of conversation by asking if they spent much time hiking or skiing in the mountains: the outdoors has always been a place of redemption for me, but their silent stares, blank and incredulous at the same time, spoke more eloquently of privilege—if not necessarily economic, then at least the good luck to have a good home and nurturing family—than any scholarly text.

Five years later, in the summer of 2007, on the way to the trailhead of what turned out to be an aborted 130-mile hike, Talia and I saw a sticker slapped on a storefront door making very clear our outsider status: our Romantic backwoods idyll would wend its way through territory celebrated and resented at the same time.

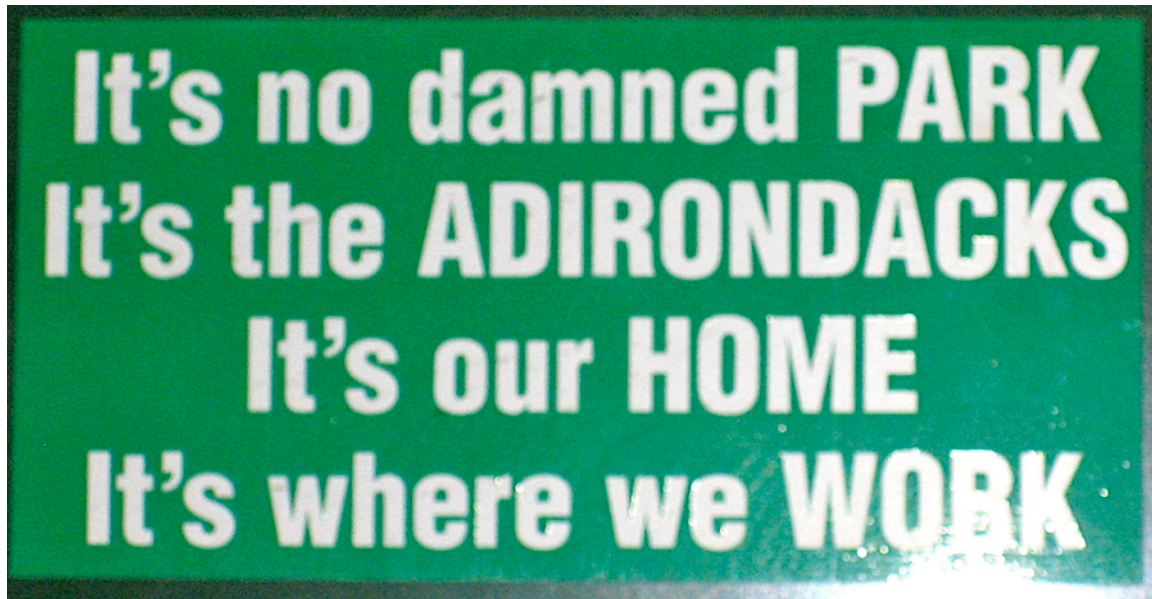


Figure 24: 2007. Author's Collection.

There's a part of me that loves the sheer orneriness of that sticker, and it reminds me of my all-time favorite: "If they call it tourist season, why can't we shoot them?" I grew up with bumper stickers like these, in a world with one all-governing typological distinction: there are locals and there are city-people. Sometimes city folks dismiss these stickers as just-so-much backwards regional chauvinism, or even worse, a dangerously explicit exclusion, and sometimes they are both. But sometimes they are poetic cries for visitors to pay attention not only to the scenery and local color, but to their own imported cultural stereotypes, as well. We who live in the country matter. There's a rhythm to the Adirondack sticker, a rhythm born of repetition and half rhyme and straight-ahead declaration. In only four lines it lays out all of the central themes and arguments that I've been struggling with: PARK, ADIRONDACKS, HOME, WORK.

PARK is the only word with a negative connotation, the only thing that doesn't belong.

Yet, the Adirondack Park isn't going anywhere. Written into the State's constitution of 1894 is the famous "Forever Wild" clause, Article VII, Section 7, which reads: "The lands of the State, now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the Forest Preserve as now fixed by law, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed."²²⁶ The land had previously been protected as a Forest Preserve under an 1885 law, but the State Forestry Commission and the foresters charged with guarding the forests were regarded by nearly everyone as ineffective, negligent, and perhaps in cahoots with the fly-by-night logging operations—the true bark eaters—that were torturing the timber and stripping the land bare. And so the Park was created in 1892 as a last-ditch effort to curb individual greed.²²⁷ But at the same time, it buried older notions of inhabited, working wildernesses, instituting, for the first time in The Great Northern Wilderness a space that finally fits the Received Wilderness Idea.

No person can cut a stick of timber, divert a stream, or dig a shovelful of ore without a constitutional amendment—the Adirondacks, or at least the parts of them owned wholly by the state, have been protected as a space for play, it seems, indefinitely. Yet it doesn't take much more than an hour's time with any of the key works of Adirondack history to discover that hunting and fishing and camping, though an important aspect of Adirondack preservation, were all secondary interests. In fact, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the Adirondacks were seen as one of the Empire State's most valuable landscapes, but only partly for its sublime and picturesque characteristics. More importantly, its intact forest cover was testimony to the State's economic might.²²⁸ George Perkins Marsh's widely read *Man and Nature* (1864) forcefully

drove home the connection between cleared land and decreased river flow, and for a state, such as New York, whose wealth depended on the navigability of the Erie Canal and Hudson River, for a state whose growing mass of Manhattanites needed clean water, preserving the Adirondacks meant ensuring financial fluidity. Preserving The City meant preserving The Wilderness.²²⁹

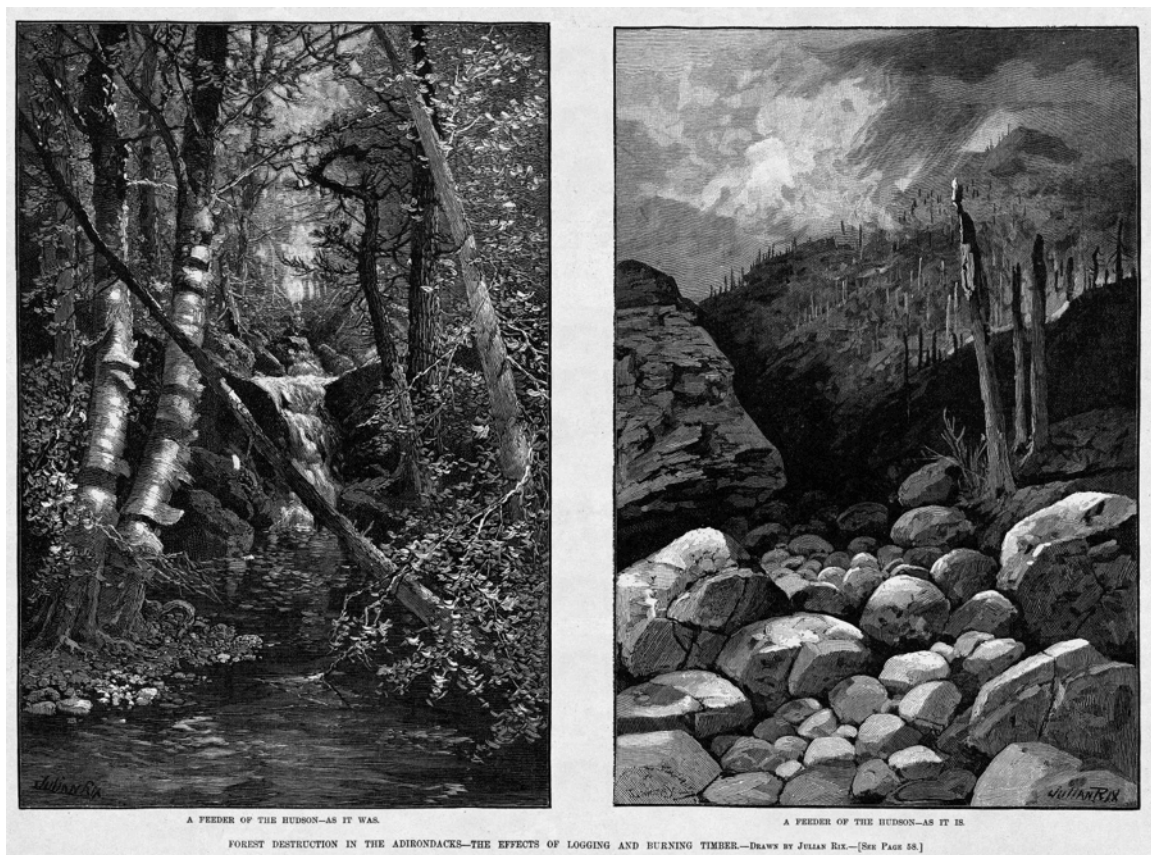


Figure 25: Julian Walbridge Rix, "Forest Destruction in the Adirondacks. The Effects of Logging and Burning Timber. A Feeder of the Hudson—As It Was. A Feeder of the Hudson—As It Is," 1885.²³⁰

It's an imperfect balance, then, between public and private, wilderness and city, use and preservation, work and play, and, depending on one's standpoint, we could say that the deep history of the landscape is one of failure. After all, the visions of Stillman and Headley and Hammond no longer seem to describe much of the Leave No Trace Adirondack Park, traced in permanent blue ink in 1892, and it is harder to argue against "The Trouble with Wilderness

Paradigm,” harder to argue that the twentieth-century Adirondacks represent an alternative to modern America. Perhaps the best proof of this is that Timbuctoo and Freeman’s Home are not recognizably upstate New York names, that racism is still fiercely rooted in U.S. soil, that, rather than a wellspring of radical social justice, the Adirondacks are a place for many to vacation far away from the city’s social strife.

So perhaps I have unwittingly chronicled a tragedy, a momentary snapshot of a landscape before the fall, but only if we think that the Adirondack drama has entered its final act. Let’s call it, tentatively, a splendid failure, W.E.B. DuBois’s bittersweet memorialization of Reconstruction. For though the radical potential of the Adirondacks has not yet come to pass, the trees have left their countermodern marks on radical and reformer alike, and an ear cocked in the right direction can hear history’s wind singing through their branches. Even Timbuctoo, so long forgotten, has made its mark on a wider American history, and, if you listen closely, you can hear the vital pulse of utopian agrarianism, the breath of an ecology of freedom in the environmental thinking of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century black intellectuals. In 1873, Frederick Douglass addressed the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association. He wasn’t a farmer—never had been—and he groped for words. As he was doing so, I wonder: did his mind wander north? “Neither you or I can afford to be ignorant of the facts of history,” he told the crowd. “The grand old earth has no prejudices against race color, or previous condition of servitude, but flings open her ample breast to all who will come to her for succor and relief.... The very soil of your State was cursed with a burning sense of injustice.... Your fields could not be lovingly planted nor faithfully cultivated in its presence.”²³¹

Forty years later, W.E.B. DuBois—born in western Massachusetts, the former first state of utopia—took a break from nonfiction to pen a novel, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911),

set in his contemporary Alabama, and which almost certainly alludes to Gerrit Smith.²³² It's a conventional love story, an early example of environmental writing with a radical political twist.²³³ A girl named Zora, a "child of the swamp...a heathen hoyden of twelve" who represents untamed nature and lives in the wilderness bordering the share-cropped fields of Colonel Cresswell, this Zora falls in love with Bles, a hardworking black farm boy, who obviously is meant to represent husbandry.²³⁴ Their budding love sunders when Bles discovers that Zora has been serially raped by the Cresswells, and both Zora and Bles wind up leaving the South, exploring politics in Washington D.C., and then, disgusted with political life, return, as adults to their homes, where they become reacquainted and decide that real change can only happen on the ground. And so they tap into their utopian agrarian roots and begin a collective biracial agricultural community, complete with hospital and school, all of it sited in the wilderness of the swamp. The novel ends on a note of tentative hope, a note of cooperation: "The swamp was living, vibrant, tremulous. There where the first long note of night shot with burning crimson, burst in sudden radiance the wide beauty of the moon. There pulsed a long glory in the air."²³⁵

Perhaps the great success of the *Great Northern Wilderness*, a success that carries through to this day, is that it has never been a simple landscape, a landscape of dualisms. Though there's much yet to do to ensure the health and well-being of its residents, both human and non, even the partisans of Deep Ecology or Wise Use have implicitly acknowledged the Adirondacks as a densely tangled thicket of continuous interaction and mutual reshaping, as a home.

When Jermain Wesley Loguen wrote to James McCune Smith of Adirondack prospects, he noted that some locals were taking advantage of the disoriented newcomers. But Loguen didn't worry himself too much; he knew that you can't erase the past:

Around every tree on which the [surveyor's] figures were engrained, there will be found trees, called witnesses, that are blazed.... In this way, or in some other similar

to it, one may know whether he has arrived at a spot where a landmark was fixed by the surveyor; and if it be the spot where he has reason to expect to find the number he is in search of, he may presume it was once there, if he finds the witnesses.²³⁶

The Adirondacks are still a home.

The trees remember.

They spice the air, in invitation, yet.

ENTR'ACTE



Figure 26: From Archibald MacLeish, *Land of the Free*, 1938.
*We allowed for the north and south and the east and west at the
Four Corners letting the creditors by
On the tarred roads with the barbed wire for scenery*
-Archibald MacLeish, 1938.¹

W.H.H. Murray's *Adventures in the Wilderness* (1869) was a sensation.

Upon its publication, a stampede of tourists lit out for the Adirondacks, a great seasonal migration known as "Murray's Fools," all of them looking for the promised wild land. Though Murray could not avoid casting the region as a lived-in home, he tried his very best to empty the woods of its people, to turn the Adirondacks into a raw, before-the-White-Man wilderness of (not too much) danger, (just enough) physical hardship, and (if not for the loggers) endless sylvan plenty.²

And yet...*Adventures in the Wilderness* is weird. No scholar mentions it, but the book's final chapter, chapter 11, is a narratively destabilizing, unresolved story-within-a-story, the sort of thing that casts a long retroactive shadow over all the preceding action, and it makes you wonder if you missed Murray's point. It's the sort of thing that it might be better to hurry past.

But I lingered, and now I wonder: what *was* his point? I find myself going back to *Adventures in the Wilderness*, not with a sharpened analytical scalpel—ready to slice my way into the heart of the matter—but with something more like a piece of photo-paper turned to the text, trying to see what images stick to the surface. I'm not sure that Murray's book as a whole makes complete denotative sense, but incoherence, a bit of chaos has its own Bacchanalian virtues. Affect may be the better divining rod for *Adventures in the Wilderness*, a book I think best read as a dense skein of intertextual nods and contemporary allusions, a book geographically and spatially adrift amidst a subtle self-awareness of cultural anxiety. It's a transitional work—part fact and part fiction, part travel guide and part essay—for a transitional world. A book set in the East, reaching its denouement in the South, and implicitly gesturing to the West. It's a chapter that closes a book published the same year that the Golden Spike connected the iron rails of the Transcontinental Railroad.

Chapter 11, the off blue-note ending an otherwise major-key movement, is the recounting of a story that Murray, who was camping on the banks of Raquette Lake in July, 1868, took down when into his company's firelight stepped The Stranger—silent, ghostly, and in possession of a Civil War tale, which begins in 1862:



Figure 27: W.J. Stillman, "Shed," 1859.³

It was at the first battle of Malvern Hill,—a battle where the carnage was more frightful, as it seems to me, than in any this side of the Alleghenies during the whole war,—that my story must begin.... About 2 P.M., we had been sent out to skirmish along the edge of the wood in which, as our generals suspected, the Rebs lay massing.... We had barely entered the underbrush when we met the heavy formations of Magruder in the very act of charging.... They were on us and over us before we could get out of the way.... When the last line of Rebs had passed over me, I was left amid the bushes with the breath nearly trampled out of me, and an ugly bayonet-gash through my thigh; and mighty little consolation was it for me at that moment to see the fellow who run me through lying stark dead at my side, with a bullet-hole in his head, his shock of

coarse black hair matted with blood, and his stony eyes looking into mine.... Never have I seen, no, not in that three days' desperate mêlée at the Wilderness, nor at that terrific repulse we had at Cold Harbor, such absolute slaughter as I saw that afternoon on the green slope of Malvern Hill....

It was nothing short of downright insanity to order men to charge that hill; and so his generals told Lee, but he would not listen to reason that day, and so he sent regiment after regiment, and brigade after brigade, and division after division, to certain death....



Figure 28: Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait, *A Good Time Coming*, 1862. Adirondack Museum.

It was at the close of the second charge, when the yelling mass reeled back from before the blaze of those sixty guns and thirty thousand rifles...that I saw from the spot where I lay a riderless horse break out of the confused and flying mass, and, with mane and tail erect and

spreading nostril, come dashing obliquely down the slope. Over fallen steeds and heaps of the dead she leaped with a motion as airy as that of the flying fox, when, fresh and unjaded, he leads away from the hounds, whose sudden cry has broken him off from hunting mice amid the bogs of the meadow. So this riderless horse came vaulting along. Now from my earliest boyhood I have had what horsemen call a “weakness” for horses. Only give me a colt of wild, irregular temper and fierce blood to tame, and I am perfectly happy. Never did lash of mine, singing through the air, fall on such a colt’s soft hide. Never did yell or kick send his hot blood from heart to head deluging his sensitive brain with fiery currents, driving him to frenzy or blinding him with fear; but touches, soft and gentle as a woman’s, caressing words, and oats given from the open palm, and unfailing kindness were the means I used to “subjugate” him. Sweet subjugation, both to him who subdues and to him who yields! The wild, unmannerly, and unmanageable colt, the fear of horsemen the country round, finding in you, not an enemy but a friend, receiving his daily food from you, and all those little “nothings” which go as far with a horse as with a woman, to win and retain affection, grows to look upon you as his protector and friend, and testifies in countless ways his fondness for you.



Figure 29: Currier & Ives, *The Soldier's Grave*, 1862. Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.⁴

So when I saw this horse, with action so free and motion so graceful, amid that storm of bullets, my heart involuntarily went out to her, and my feelings rose higher and higher at every leap she took amid the whirlwind of fire and lead. And as she plunged at last over a little hillock out of range and came careening toward me as only a riderless horse might come...I forgot my wound and all the wild roar of battle, and, lifting myself involuntarily to a sitting posture as she swept grandly by, gave her a ringing cheer.

This wild mare, streaming the blood of its former owner, comes over to The Stranger: she's the most beautiful thing he's ever seen. Murray devotes two pages to The Stranger's loving, sensuous description of every body curve, every lock of hair, every personality trait, a sublime moment amidst carnage.

When The Stranger's men find him later, nearly insensible, the horse refuses to leave his side, and accompanies him back to Washington, where he recovers from his injuries. Upon regaining his senses, he awakes to find the horse tending his bedside. Breaking down in tears of gratitude, The Stranger names her Gulnare, after Jullanár, the beautiful slave girl of *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, sold to King Sháh-Zemán for ten-thousand pieces of gold, the girl whose beauty "was such as would cure the malady of the sick, and extinguish the fire of the thirsty."⁵

I am not ashamed to say that I put both my arms around her neck, and, burying my face in her silken mane, kissed her again and again. Wounded, weak, and away from home, with only strangers to wait upon me, and scant service at that, the affection of this lovely creature for me, so tender and touching, seemed almost human, and my heart went out to her beyond any power of expression, as to the only being, of all the thousands around me, who thought of me and loved me....

The war, at last, was over. Gulnare and I were in at the death with Sheridan at the Five Forks. Together we had shared the pageant at Richmond and Washington, and never had I seen her in better spirits than on that day at the capital.

That night they sleep together for want of lodging, and once awake, prepared to board a train for The Stranger's unnamed Home.

I thought of home, unvisited for four long years,—that home I left as a stripling, but to which I was returning a bronzed, brawny man....



Figure 30: Emanuel Leutz, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way*, 1861. Smithsonian.

About three o'clock in the afternoon a change came over Gulnare.... Her eyes were dull and heavy. Never before had I seen the light go out of them. The rocking of the car as it went jumping and vibrating along seemed to irritate her. She began to rub her head against the side of the car. Touching it, I found that the skin over the brain was hot as fire. Her breathing grew rapidly louder and louder. Each breath was drawn with a kind of gasping effort. The lids with their silken fringe drooped wearily over the lustreless eyes. The head sank lower and lower, until the nose almost touched the floor. The ears, naturally so lively and erect, hung limp and widely

apart. The body was cold and senseless. A pinch elicited no motion. Even my voice was at last unheeded. To word and touch there came for the first time in all our intercourse, no response. I knew as the symptoms spread what was the matter. The signs all bore one way. She was in the first stages of phrenitis, or inflammation of the brain. In other words, my beautiful mare was going mad.

The cure was apparently to bleed her, but he had misplaced his pocketknife.

“My God!” I exclaimed in despair, as I shut the door and turned toward her, “must I see you die, Gulnare, when the opening of a vein would save you? Have you borne me, my pet, through all these years of peril, the icy chill of winter, the heat and torment of summer, and all the thronging dangers of a hundred bloody battles, only to die torn by fierce agonies, when so near a peaceful home?”

But little time was given me to mourn. My life was soon to be in peril, and I must summon up the utmost power of eye and limb to escape the violence of my frenzied mare. Did you ever see a mad horse when his madness is on him? Take your stand with me in that car, and you shall see what suffering a dumb creature can endure before it dies. In no malady does a horse suffer more than in phrenitis.... A horse laboring under an attack of phrenitis is as violent as a horse can be.... He is unconscious in his violence. He sees and recognizes no one. There is no method or purpose in his madness. He kills without knowing it....

Exhibitions of pain which I pray God I may never see again....



Figure 31: A.J. Russell, *Rebel Caisson Destroyed by Federal Shells, at Fredericksburg, May 3, 1863*. Courtesy Library of Congress.⁶

The mare raised herself until her shoulders touched the roof, then dashed her body upon the floor with such a violence which threatened the stout frame beneath her. I leaned, panting and exhausted, against the side of the car. Gulnare did not stir. She lay motionless, her breath coming and going in lessening respirations. I tottered toward her, and, as I stood above her, my ear detected a low gurgling sound. Gulnare, in her frenzied violence, had broken a blood-vessel, and was bleeding internally. Pain and life were passing away together. I knelt down by her side. I laid my head upon her shoulder and sobbed aloud. Her body moved a little beneath me. I crawled forward and lifted her beautiful head into my lap. O, for one more sign of recognition before she died! I smoothed the tangled masses of her mane. I wiped, with a fragment of my coat, torn in the struggle, the blood which oozed from her nostril. I called her by name. My desire was granted. The redness of frenzy had passed out of them. She saw and recognized me. I spoke again. Her eye lighted a moment with the old and intelligent look of love. Her ear moved; her nostril quivered gently as she strove to neigh. The effort was in vain. Her love was greater than

*her strength. She moved her head a little, as if she would be nearer me, looked once more with her clear eyes into my face, breathed a long breath, straightened her shapely limbs, and died. And there, holding the head of my dead mare in my lap, while the great warm tears fell one after another down my cheeks, I sat until the sun went down, the shadows darkened in the car, and night drew her mantle, colored like my grief, over the world.*⁷



Figure 32: A.J. Russell, “Hall’s Fill above Granite Canon,” ca. 1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.⁸

And so Adventures in the Wilderness ends.

PART THREE

Revelator's Progress: Sun Pictures of the 1000 Mile Tree.

"O.K., here we go." Roswell lit a ruby darkroom lamp. Took a dry plate from a carrying case. "Hold this a minute." Started measuring out liquids from two or three different bottles, keeping up a sort of patter meantime, hardly any of which Merle could follow...Stirring it all in a beaker, he put the plate in a developing tray and poured the mixture over it. "Now watch." And Merle saw the image appear. Come from nothing. Come in out of the pale Invisible, down into this otherwise explainable world, clearer than real. It happened to be the Newburgh asylum, with two or three inmates standing in the foreground, staring. Merle peered uneasily. Something was wrong with their faces. The whites of their eyes were dark gray. The sky behind the tall, jagged roofline was nearly black, windows that should have been light-colored were dark. As if light had been witched somehow into its opposite....

-Thomas Pynchon, 2006.¹

1.

When A.J. Russell, smelling of woodsmoke and the balsam fir that made up his camp bed, first arrived, he and his assistant had to unload the photographic wagon and make his field laboratory ready for use: with great care he prepared the dark tent affixed to the back of his wagon and into it, in their particular basins, beakers, and receptacles, went all the various baths of silver, resin, water, and other chemicals required for coating and developing the glass-plate negative.² Then he removed his cameras, the polished glass, brass, and wood sharply reflecting the very light excluded from their dark interiors until the proper moment, when tacky chemical skin and sun's beam would give birth. Pacing around the site, noting the wind coming out of the east—perhaps fretting about this dry Utah air—framing the shot in his mind's eye, he selected a view based on the light, the aspect of the surrounding hills, the composition slowly gaining form and structure, if only in his head. How to capture the evergreen, telegraph pole, and bleached tree skeleton? What to do with that hulking pile of rubble? Where to have the train stop? Should the hills frame the picture, or remain beyond the camera's monocular eye, invisible and unknown? His experience as a landscape painter and his European study helped him to organize his images into strong, balanced, and above all expressive transmutations of the land his eye traveled over.³

Gathering together his subjects and giving them precise directions on where and how to stand, sending one up to the very top of the tree, a small flag in his hand, and one to the apex of the ballast pile, Russell was ready to begin the alchemical work of turning inanimate—indeed, anti-animate—cyanide and gun cotton, silver and glass, into an image lifelike enough that this new art of photography raised fears as to the nature of reality. They were so true to life, these sun drawings, so exact and detailed, so mysterious, that they elicited fear at the same time that they commanded admiration. Though this archetypically modern technology seemed to breathe

Progress, its soul remained resolutely premodern. Simply put, photography was, and still is, a sort of necromancy, a way to freeze life, to reanimate the dead, to bring the distant near to hand. Some thought the intense focus of the photographic sitter, as he stared at the lens, burned his image into the glass plate. Others, that their shadow literally stuck to the camera's film. Writers imagined the horrific, erotic possibilities of the photograph's ability to duplicate reality: what if the people in the images were actually alive, what if the photograph were a window into the private lives of its subjects?⁴ What sublimely dreadful possibilities did this new technology offer? The less gothically inspired wondered what potential for a new world, what potential for revelation did the new technology hold? Ned Buntline, in *Love at First Sight; or, The Daguerreotype. A Romantic Study in Real Life* (1848?), imagined that an image of a beautiful, though destitute, young woman, displayed in a daguerreotypist's studio could inspire such love in a wealthy patron that he would search high and low for her and ultimately discover her utterly penniless, wracked by illness, and one step away from prostituting herself on Boston's mean streets, thereby saving her from "this crooked, chequered, wilderness of a town, where poor girls are as plenty as flowers in the prairie grass."⁵ The story might seem fantastic, but if living images could be made to stick to inanimate glass or metal, who could judge where the line between fantasy and reality lay?

After all, the short history of photography was filled with obscure tales of surpassing strangeness, like the one about the alchemist who "conjured up the devil and all the imps of darkness...[and] in vain ransacked the books of magic...for the formula of that panacea which was to prolong life.... He threw some sea salt into a solution of nitrate of silver and obtained a precipitate...to which the alchemists of those times gave the name 'Luna cornea'....He collected it, and what was his astonishment when he perceived that this substance, as white as milk,

became suddenly black as soon as a ray of sunlight fell on its surface!” Then there was the story of the mysterious Parisian who handed to a prominent inventor a perfectly developed image of the city’s streets, along with a vial-full of an inky black solution that he claimed could capture reality. Before the inventor could ask for the contents, the stranger spun on his heel and dissolved in bright daylight. Science itself seemed powerless to explain how silver, sunlight, and a few common chemicals could capture an image true to life: “light acts on the nitrates of silver. Why? No one knows and perhaps no one will ever know, but the fact is manifest, and this action is the fundamental basis of photography.”⁶ And then, of course, there was the awe which came as a natural complement to the fear: “before another generation has passed away, it will be recognized that a new epoch in the history of human progress dates from the time when He who ‘never but in uncreated light/dwelt from eternity’ took a pencil from the hand of the ‘angel standing in the sun,’ and placed it in the hands of a mortal.”⁷

Perhaps these thoughts ran through the photographer’s mind as he carefully slipped a 10”x13” glass plate from its protective wooden box, and perhaps not.⁸ Having already placed his camera and tripod, arranged his subjects, and gingerly manipulated the camera’s lens into a fine focus, he had only a very few minutes to transform the untreated piece of glass into a negative, which had to be exposed while the silver coating its surface was still damp. Not only did he have to fight against time, but the wind, and the general dryness of the southwest Rocky Mountains likewise conspired against photographic art.⁹ First, the plate had to be cleaned, preferably with Tripoli powder and alcohol, then dried with Japanese paper, for the slightest oily smear or wind-borne fleck of dust would ruin the bond between the collodion and the glass. Then, by the light of a red candle-powered lamp, the collodion itself had to be carefully poured on top of the plate in a very particular way so that the liquid flowed evenly over the entire surface, but *never*

touched the same bit of glass twice. It had to form a perfectly uniform layer on the glass: a shaky hand and astigmatic coating led to distorted images. Sometimes the collodion, for whatever mysterious reason of its own, simply refused to cohere, and the photographer could do nothing but wait for it to change its mind.¹⁰ But when it chose to play along, and the photographer was able to coat the glass properly, he plunged the plate into a bath of the alchemical silver nitrate, deftly slid the now fertile negative into a frame called a dark slide—a device which would shield the negative from any stray sunbeam as he hurried from dark tent to tripod—and, reaching his camera, slipped the whole thing into the back of the expectant apparatus. The face of the darkened glass facing the lens was outfitted with a sort of hatch, and checking over his view one last time, he pulled this hatch from the frame, hollered something like “keep quite still” to his anxious sitters, held his breath...and removed the lens cap, letting in the day.

And then he waited. He waited for more than a few seconds. He waited long enough for the flag in the hand of the man at the tree’s summit to disappear into a blur. He waited for up to a few minutes, not counting out the time mechanically with a watch, but instead *feeling* the picture emerge as the camera’s lens did its work, judging by long experience when the outside world had been perfectly mirrored, the plate, each one individually idiosyncratic, “exposed in accordance with the nature of the collodion,” as the textbooks put it. And when he had waited long enough, he gingerly replaced the lens cap, shut the dark slide’s trap, and removed the plate, pregnant with possibility, from the back of the camera. Carefully shielding it from the sun’s now deadly rays, he returned to the safe red light of his dark tent, poured the sulphate of iron solution over the negative, and watched as the picture appeared “gradually as if by enchantment, clear, pure, sharp; the details...admirably distinct; the light...free from stains, and the blacks...represented by distinct tones varying according to the depth of shadow.”¹¹ Russell’s practiced eye would be able

to translate the negative, with its perfect substitution of night for day, into what the final product would be: a beautifully gold-toned image.

“To say the morning sun reveals untold beauties, is commonplace indeed. Words cannot express or describe it,” he would write, within the year.¹²



Figure 33: Russell, *1000 Mile Tree. 1000 Miles West of Omaha.*, c. 1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.¹³

2.

Russell made his picture in Utah’s Weber Canyon in 1869; one hundred and forty years later, *1000 Mile Tree. 1000 Miles West of Omaha.* retains its impact, especially the large albumen print. Simply put, albumen printing is a deeply beautiful, arresting method of turning an

inert chemical image on a glass slide into a living, breathing work of art, a mix of elemental organic, living substance—the albumen from a hen’s egg—and modern science. Because the albumen traps the image-laden silver compound a hair’s breadth above the paper, these photographs literally have depth: they cast their own shadow.¹⁴ Part of the sheer Dionysian pleasure of *1000 Mile Tree* lies in abandoning oneself to it, in letting one’s eye be drawn by the strong, converging diagonal lines of the hillsides to the pile of ballast in the center of the photograph. In recognizing all the suggestively resonant variations on arboreal themes: the vertical lines both of the 1000 Mile Tree and the two telegraph poles to its right, the horizontal bleached tree skeleton in the immediate center foreground, which implicitly gestures to the stripped and trimmed tree trunks lying underneath the train’s steel rails. In wondering, who are the fifty-two people crowded around the base of the 1000 Mile Tree festooned with its commemorative nametag? They seem almost an inconsequential multitude. And the train: where is it? Why is a locomotive not the subject, the center of the photograph? Why do we only see the caboose, an afterthought slipping behind the rubble pile? Again, one’s eyes are led back to the center by those converging lines, framed by the vertical Tree and poles, back to the rubble pile, the telegraph pole that juts from its peak, and to the man who, because of Russell’s decision to flatten the depth of field using his camera’s lens, seems almost nailed to the cruciform shape. With a start, perhaps, one realizes that A.J. Russell has brought Calvary to Utah, and made the 1000 Mile Tree witness to a crucifixion.¹⁵

Hired by the Union Pacific Railroad in 1868 to document the completion of the transcontinental line, Russell is the author of perhaps the most famous photograph in all of American history, one many of us can easily call before our mind’s eye.¹⁶ Entitled *East and West Shaking Hands at Laying Last Rail*, it is the iconic view of the completion of the railroad.¹⁷

Locomotives from both the Union and Central Pacific lines meet, cow-catcher to cow-catcher, men on each engine joyously extend bottles of champagne to each other as Leland Stanford and Thomas Durant, flanked by a large crowd, stand in the center and shake hands, the two railroad executives mirroring the physical touch of their trains.



Figure 34: Russell, *East And West Shaking Hands at Laying Last Rail*, c. 1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.¹⁸

East and West Shaking Hands certainly captures a moment of triumph, the conquest of space and time, the promised birth of a nation defined by hard work and economic well-being clearly showing on the expectant faces of those gathered for the occasion. It seems like technology and humanity are harmonious extensions of each other, each with a will to bridge the continent.¹⁹ “The great Rail Road problem of the age has been solved,” crowed Russell at the time.²⁰ He was originally from the small town of Nunda, in Western New York, and had modern transportation

in his blood: his family worked at canal and railroad building throughout the mid-nineteenth century, and he thrilled to the moment when the rails were joined.²¹ Truly it was a momentous occasion. Indeed, it's hard to even conceive of modern American history without the transcontinental railroad, and it continues, to this day, to be seen as one of America's finest moments.²² But it is hard to read such unalloyed enthusiasm into *1000 Mile Tree*, and though so far I've spent hours lost in the scene, it still leaves me feeling anxious. First of all, it's a terrible travel memento for the passengers, passengers whose individualism has been effaced through their distance from the camera lens. Even with the fine-grained precision of the collodion, the distance makes sure that there's little beyond mere facts—the number of travellers, their dress—to be gleaned, no smiles or frozen laughs, no exchanged glances, no facial twitch of impatience or expectation. There's no human connection, nothing really to distinguish them from simulacra, merely. These are shades of people, rendered universal, strangely alienated from each other, from their surrounding world, and from us, the audience, as well. We stare at an image of tiny non-entities staring back at us, and we're reminded that one can't be both in the photograph and holding it in one's hands, participant and audience, subject and object, at the same time, even if photographs play on an emotional register with such distinctions. The distance to the *1000 Mile Tree* is simply too far.

But here, at this last instant, is where Russell corrals his audience, keeps us from bolting off into the undifferentiated landscape of either pure relativism or, worse, the incomprehensibility of indifference. For it is alienation—the individuals from each other, from their landscape; and the viewer from the viewed—that unites the audience and the actors across the visual divide. It's not that they are us, but that their situation is like ours. We've all been stranded at Calvary. Because of this, the photograph makes an equally poor railroad

advertisement: it's the train itself that is doing the leaving. And we ask, why? Why are they, we, being marooned at the site of a crucifixion? Who, or what has been crucified? By whom? For whose sins? What have we done?²³

3.

From its very beginning, photography has been understood as both a troubling new medium and a utopian technology. Whereas the railroad and the accompanying telegraph sought to collapse difference and distance, in a sense, dissolved time, the photograph freezes it, preserves difference—and thereby makes its subjects seem momentarily strange.²⁴ “*Form is henceforth divorced from matter,*” proclaimed Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1859, yet this very modern quality of aesthetic abstraction imbedded in the meaning of photography caused a great deal of anxiety.²⁵ It still does. Roland Barthes, in a beautifully written meditation on photography, muses that there is something strange about being presented with a photograph of oneself that corresponds to no personal memory. And in a way, there is something stranger still about being presented with an old photograph of an unfamiliar person, an ironic remove in which we, the audience, are aware of elapsed time that the photograph’s subject can know nothing of. For Barthes, photographs bring us face to face with unrequited longing and ultimately death.²⁶ But the great promise of the photograph was its pretension to objectivity, its ability to rein in the imagination, to cut Barthes off, as it were, with pure facticity.²⁷ In the 1840s and 1850s, a true photographic portrait was thought to capture an inner essence of the sitter: the comparatively long exposure times allowed a person’s character to emerge.²⁸ This is part of the logic behind the infamous “rogue’s gallery,” in which photographs illustrating notorious physiognomic features were gathered into a sort of field-guide, which could be used not only to apprehend criminals on

the lam, but also to predict who would commit a violent crime before that crime ever occurred.²⁹ Louis Agassiz, too, felt that photographs captured essential forms, and in 1850, sniffing what to him seemed to be the unacceptably sour reek of social justice in the air, commissioned J.T. Zealey of Columbia, South Carolina to photograph a number of Southern slaves. Agassiz hoped these images might therefore prove that different races were created individually by separate thoughts of God, and therefore that race was an immutable characteristic, providing, once and for all, an irrefutable scientific basis for white supremacy.³⁰

Yet, even though photography and its preservation of difference might seem at odds with the railroad and its abilities of standardization—Thoreau equated the railroad’s prophesied triumph to “grading the whole surface of the planet,” and one thinks of the inventions of the time zones, a corporate decision unilaterally made by the railroads in 1883—they seemed cut from similar cloth to many nineteenth-century observers: both relied on mysterious forces that nevertheless appeared pedestrian (photosensitive chemicals and thermodynamics, light and steam), both were technological wonders, and both claimed to conquer nature.³¹ Edgar Allan Poe thought that the camera “must undoubtedly be regarded as the most important, and perhaps the most extraordinary triumph of modern science.”³² It’s a sentiment that could be applied equally well to the railroads. And so there shouldn’t be anything strange—though, delightfully, there is—in discovering that the first plans for the transcontinental railroad developed alongside a daguerreotypist’s images in the red glow of a dark room.

When John Plumbe, Jr., first arrived in Wisconsin in 1836, he had already served as an apprentice under the renowned civil engineer Wirt Robinson, and had helped survey the nation’s first set of interstate railroad tracks through the Allegheny Mountains. The sight of the treeless plains must tripped a crucial circuit in his fertile imagination, for soon after settling down he

began proselytizing for a transcontinental railroad, for a future that he was convinced was imminent.³³ In 1837 and 1838, he petitioned Congress through his territorial representative, and in 1838 he actually secured a contract, and \$2000, to survey the route from Milwaukee to his newly adopted hometown of Sinipee, Wisconsin. Not everyone was as convinced as Plumbe that his plan was practical, or even possible, and his ideas were regarded by many as “wild and visionary in the extreme—premature a century at least—the emanation of a mad enthusiast’s brain.”³⁴ Indeed, when the territorial governor passed through town, his secretary had the opportunity to hear Plumbe expound on his idea:

At the hotel in which we stopped there was a young man of some twenty-five years of age, who had a table in the public room of the house, upon which he had spread maps, charts and diagrams, with manuscript notes and a published pamphlet descriptive of a route for a railroad between the lakes at Chicago to the Pacific Ocean...It was said by the villagers that the young man was crazy, and I remember the Governor thought that he was a visionary, while I did not give much thought to the subject.³⁵

As these things tended to do, Plumbe’s dreams for a transcontinental railroad slid into his adventures in boosterism, and in 1839—the year that Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre invented the device that would bear his name and play such a large role in Plumbe’s future—he published a small tract entitled *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin, Taken During a Residence of Three Years in those Territories*, which sang, in the most baroque of phrases, the virtues of the Midwest. In many ways it’s a conventional bit of advertisement for a speculative venture: he’s included dozens of letters from respectable people who claim that they’ve never seen such black soil, such delightful weather, such plentiful crop yields. But toward the end he makes claims that ought to have turned even the most shameless promoter’s cheeks red: “A *National Rail Road*...has already been commenced under the auspices of the General Government... and an enlightened Congress has now entered upon a plan, whereby, ultimately, to secure to the United States, the *free* use,

forever, of a Grand National Rail Road from lake Michigan to the Pacific Ocean!” (Neither claim was true.) Clearly bewitched by his own vision, Plumbe breathlessly continued, “such are the incomparable advantages possessed by this means of intercourse, over every other yet known—or that probably ever will be—and so great the enterprise and energy of the American people—that by the time the link between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi, is added to the chain, we shall enjoy the magnificent spectacle of one continuous line of Railway, from Maine to Iowa!”³⁶ Plumbe wasn’t the garden-variety huckster: he seems to have truly believed that the transcontinental railroad was a common good, and would only further what he understood as the utopian American experiment in democracy. “The high, the low, the rich, the poor, will all be benefited—*none* will be injured,” he stressed in more than 20 newspaper articles between 1847 and 1849.³⁷

Perhaps it is fitting that a man so enraptured by his vision of technological utopia would be equally captivated by the mechanical ability to freeze the present and preserve the past. And so, in 1840, when Plumbe found himself in Boston he took it upon himself to learn the year-old art of sun drawing from one of Daguerre’s agents. Soon after, he began promoting himself as a “Professor of photography” in a variety act that included a female magician, a head-reading phrenologist, a giant, and the Tattooed Man.³⁸ From the carnivalesque to the respectable was only a fine readjustment in focus, and within five years Plumbe was the most recognized name in American photography.³⁹

In 1846, at the height of Plumbe’s success, a young Walt Whitman visited his New York studio and came away struggling to find language to match the combination of modernity and superstition embodied by the photograph. The illusionary, doubling power of Plumbe’s images worked their ironies on his prose, and Whitman became enchanted by his eyes’ revelations:

“You will see more *life* there—more variety, more human nature, more artistic beauty... than in any spot we know of.” It seemed as if Plumbe had created an alternate city, a whirl in the bustle and mute roar of the streets: “In whichever direction you turn your gaze, you see nought but human faces! There they stretch, from floor to ceiling—hundreds of them...human eyes gazing silently but fixedly upon you, and creating the impression of an immense Phantom concourse—speechless and motionless, but yet *realities*. You are indeed in a new world—a peopled world, though mute as the grave.” There is a sinister vision here, a discomfiting powerlessness, a sense that the daguerreotype—itsself a voyeur—looks back, stripping the audience of its anonymity. Such sudden nakedness Whitman found, unsurprisingly, sublimely titillating, a mesmeric fascination holding the viewer with its inaudible siren song.

There is always, to us, a strange fascination in portraits. We love to dwell long upon them—to infer many things, from the text they preach—to pursue the current of thoughts running riot about them. It is singular what a peculiar influence is possessed by the *eye* of a well painted miniature or portrait—It has a sort of magnetism...An electric chain seems to vibrate, as it were, between our brain, and him or her preserved there so well by the limner’s cunning. Time, space, both are annihilated, and we identify the semblance with the reality.—And even more than that. For the strange fascination of looking at the eyes of a portrait, sometimes goes beyond what comes from the real orbs themselves.

Magnetism, spiritualism, the mysterious effects of electric forces as they pulsed through the ether: Whitman understands that these pseudo-scientific things are all tied to the annihilation of space and time—a phrase often applied to the effects of the railroad as well—that Plumbe is something like a magician or high priest who has used the insights of science to create a mythical alternate world eerily similar to and yet distinct from the ordinary streets of New York.⁴⁰

But these heady days soon ended, and Plumbe, financially overextended, his photographic empire in collapse, headed to California in 1849, not as an Argonaut, but with the addition of California and the Mexican Cession making a transcontinental rail link seem not so

foolish after all, on a quest to promote his obsession. Along the way he traded “Professor” for “Colonel.” And when he landed in Sacramento—clairvoyantly anticipating the western terminus of the transcontinental railroad—Colonel Plumbe once more found himself in the real-estate business and in competition with a band of “‘codfish’ aristocratic monopolists of others’ rights,” whose tactics included arson and deadly armed street brawls.⁴¹ But this new plan, too, came to nothing.

By the 1850s his health was failing, his money gone, and he had nothing but a pocket full of near misses. Plumbe’s great gift, and also his misfortune, was to foresee a world frustratingly unreachable despite the clarity it attained in his own mind. In his *Memorial Against Mr. Asa Whitney’s Railroad Scheme* (1851), written to dissuade Congress from granting exclusive rights of monopoly to Whitney for the construction and operation of a transcontinental link, Plumbe paints a wondrous picture of everything that the railroad could bring, including peace to the “whole human family,” but only if run for the benefit of the common wealth. His was more of a communal vision than Whitney’s dreams of private profit, which might be one reason why, even today, scholars tend to slight Plumbe.⁴²

Realizing that the verbal pictures in his *Memorial* might have taken on a bit too much artistic license, Plumbe asked his audience to see matters as he saw them, to “decide whether, with such a soil and climate as those of the Great West, I am not fully warranted in painting this picture I have presented to your view as a true *daguerreotype*.”⁴³

Far from unrealizable, his plans for the transcontinental railroad—including where the eastern and western termini would be, and how the federal government would fund the construction through the sale of alternating sections of public land—proved in time to be heartbreakingly prescient. Unable to live in the future, and unwilling to live in the present,

Plumbe committed suicide in 1857. Had he lived a scant five years longer, Plumbe would have seen his obsession with getting the federal government to support a transcontinental railroad come to the fruition in the Pacific Railway Act. But it's Whitman, slipping into the second person, who put his finger on Plumbe's importance: his art, his genius, was to reveal a new world, a world that breathed, that had a certain power over ours, that *lived*. "Plumbe's beautiful and multifarious pictures all strike you... with their *naturalness*, and the *life-look* of the eye—that soul of the face! In all his vast collection...we notice not one that has a dead eye," he wrote eleven years before Plumbe's death.⁴⁴

4.

There is a way in which Whitman was right about photography when he wrote "you are indeed in a new world—a peopled world, though mute as the grave." Though it's hard to say what effect his work had on the photographers of the later nineteenth century, Plumbe's descendants certainly continued to bargain between death and life eternal, between present, future, and past, to imbue their inert glass plates and mixtures of chemicals with a living spark. During the Civil War, some photographers understood that the camera had an almost talismanic power to affect the outcome. "The assistance rendered the national arms during our late war by photography," wrote the editor of *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* in 1882, "was much greater and very much more important in its results than most people imagine."⁴⁵ The photographer he specifically referred to was none other than A.J. Russell, who developed his photographic art by framing the horrors of the Civil War. The only photographer actually enlisted by the U.S. Army to shoot the Confederates with a camera's lens, Russell would write of his experience, "the memories of our great war come down to us and will pass on to future generations with more

accuracy and more truth-telling than that of any previous struggle.”⁴⁶ Characteristically, he gives us no hint as to what register those memories operated in.

Russell was certainly a patriot. When war broke out, he painted a panorama—“the most important work of its kind in progress,” trumpeted the Hornellsville *Journal*—depicting battle for the purpose of encouraging enlistment in the Union Army.⁴⁷ Though panoramas now seem like a quaint craft found most often in outdated science textbooks and museum exhibits on prehistoric life, in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth-century they were by far the most popular visual medium, the furor over photography notwithstanding.⁴⁸ As if that were not enough, he also formed his own company of recruits, the 141st Regiment of New York Infantry, and in a move reminiscent of Colonel Plumbe, named himself its commander, Captain Russell.⁴⁹ For reasons that are not quite clear, Russell was personally chosen by General Herman Haupt, head of the Construction Corps of the United States Army Military Railroad, to head the one-man Photographic Corps of the U.S Army in 1863.⁵⁰ Whatever Russell knew of photography in 1863, it couldn’t have been much, because his first act in his new commission was to hire one of Matthew Brady’s assistants, the shadowy Egbert (or Edgar) Guy Faux (or Fowks, or Fowx)—no one is quite clear on the orthography of his name. Faux taught Russell the secrets of imitation, of miming real life with camera and collodion for \$300: the same fee a wealthy Northern gentleman paid a poorer body double to take his place on the front.⁵¹

Faux, by all appearances, earned his pay, as many of Russell’s Civil War pictures are clear, undistorted, fine-grained illustrations of General Haupt’s prowess in bridge building, rail repairing, and destroying the Confederacy’s infrastructure. The General’s version of the war is, unsurprisingly, a glorious one, full of astonishing victories that come at the last minute, long-shot victories secured against all odds by the Construction Corps. And so it is surprising that a

number of Russell's photographs subvert the triumphalism of the Civil War, and even highlight the silliness of Haupt's braggadocio.

If, in the 1860s, you had wanted to make a picture that would stiffen men's spines, a picture of a hero, you probably couldn't have done much better than to emulate Emanuel Leutze's famous 1851 painting of Washington crossing an ice-choked Delaware River. (He was the same painter whose *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* (1862) would later grace the U.S. Capitol.) Leutze pictures a magnificently dressed general defiantly, boldly standing in a desperately over-full boat almost magnetically pulling his soldiers forward, eyes fixed on a triumphal future, and it was an utter sensation upon its debut. Copies were engraved and distributed widely, and so Russell was undoubtedly aware of it. But when he photographed Haupt, we see a tall man precariously crammed into his floating contraption, looking warily, and none-too-bravely off to his right, paddling with a ridiculously outsized oar from a rowboat. He looks unsteady, as if the jagged pylon jutting out from the right-hand of the frame is about to toss him overboard.



Figure 35: Emanuel Leutz, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, 1851. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 36: Russell, *Gen'l H. Haupt*, c. 1862-c. 1863. Courtesy Library of Congress.⁵²

Whereas Leutze's *Washington* is made of metal, an inspiring figure one would gladly follow into battle, Haupt looks simply absurd. Even Haupt seems belatedly to realize this predicament, and in his *Reminiscences* pleads with his audience that, despite the photo, this pontoon boat invention of his really is a brilliant idea, with many practical applications: it could be hidden, the enemy

would never know of the spy in its midst, the boat's pieces broken down and "carried by a strap around the waist and concealed by an overcoat."⁵³

On May 3rd, 1863, during the Battle of Chancellorsville—a continuation of the long, and very bloody December, 1862 battle of Fredericksburg—Russell took what has become one of the iconic images of the Civil War, and again, it is composed to gently question the glory and triumph of war.



Figure 37: Russell, *Stone Wall, Rear of Fredericksburg, May 3d, 1863*, 1863. Courtesy Library of Congress.⁵⁴

The scene is peopled by corpses. It is significant that in most of Russell's photographs—during the war as well as during his tenure with the Union Pacific—there are almost always living humans in the frame. But here, the closest we get is a dead soldier, shot in the head, bloody face tilted skyward in death as if in his final extremity looking for salvation. It recalls that panorama he painted at the outset of the war, which was huge and spoke "volumes of truth relative to camp life, battle scenes, showing the extreme excitement, as well as the resignation of the wounded

and the dying, and the marble-cold expression of the up-turned faces of the dead.”⁵⁵ Perhaps ironically, the viewer is implied in this image, the camera’s eye is ours—it’s at a human height, taken as if we were looking down at the scene, in person, the sole surviving witness behind the wall. It’s also a landscape image, the surrounding trees and stone wall not just backdrop, not just setting, merely, but crucial parts of the photo. On any other day, Marye’s Heights would be the scene for a picturesque view of Fredericksburg. But on this day, preserved forever, a horrible stillness allows one to question the bloody orgy that has occurred only a few moments before, which is particularly suggestive given that it pictures Confederate dead at Marye’s Heights. During the first battle of Fredericksburg, in December of 1862, the Union had suffered terribly, their losses far outnumbered Southern casualties, and Marye’s Heights was the site of some of the most desperate fighting. The North lost that battle, but in May of 1863, when the battalions of blue-coated soldiers returned, they momentarily overran the Heights. Russell was immediately on the scene, making his view, and was later praised for his “eye of an artist in choosing his stand points for the most favorable presentation of the objects or scenes taken.”⁵⁶ Again, the North ended up losing Chancellorsville, which makes Russell’s photo all the more remarkable: rather than demonizing the dead as devilish secessionists who got their fair due, Russell, by placing us on their side of the stone wall, asks us to identify with the slain, with *them*, not in their political aims, but in the common suffering that war brought to living bodies on both sides.



Figure 38: Russell, *Engine "Government" down the "Banks" near Brandy, April, 1864*, 1864. Library of Congress.⁵⁷

Even as events tilted decisively toward Union victory, Russell continued to make pictures suffused with ambivalence about the war and about the future. One of the starker images is entitled *Engine Government Down the 'Banks,' near Brandy, April 1864*, and at first glance it seems like the sort of conventional photograph that one would expect from a man whose commission was to make images of war and trains. But the title is a dead giveaway, and the photo literally tells us that government—the ship of state—has been overturned. The people in Russell's image seem powerless to help, those off to the left even squatting in the dust, waiting for an unknown something. As in *1000 Mile Tree*, the figures are small, generic, their size and lack of specificity ridiculously outmatched by the sheer heft and intricacy of the overturned train, whose guts—the most visually complex part of the photo—lay exposed for postmortem

examination. Our eye is meant to follow the tracks—Russell has placed his camera centered over the right rail—into the empty distance, only to be interrupted by the knot of people in the background. There is no sense that the road disappears into the horizon, often a sign of promise and hope for a rosy future; indeed, the very landscape itself seems foreboding. Its barrenness and uniformity, bridged only by a technological wonder now far beyond help, threaten either to swallow the characters in the photo, or to condemn them to wandering in this featureless desert. Progress—of transportation, of government—has been derailed in this view, leaving its passengers to sit in the dust.

The photographer, Russell seems to say, is a witness mediating between the past, present, and future, between death and life. Looking back, in 1882, on his role in the war, Russell described how his photographer friend Thomas Roche was suddenly bombarded when making pictures of the battle at Dutch Gap Canal: “down...with the roar of a whirlwind [came] a ten inch shell, which exploded, throwing the dirt in all directions.” Miraculously unscathed, Roche went on to make a number of pictures of the scene, to fix the moment of battle, of death, permanently. Russell paints a complicated verbal picture that emphasizes earthquakes and ordinance tearing at the ground, as well as an almost organic liveliness: “shells flying in all directions, leaving their trails of fire and fading away only to be replaced by others....The whole world seemed alive; every road was teeming and the call to arms seemed to find a response from every foot of the ground”⁵⁸ There’s something about this description, the linking of death and life, that sounds like a biblical vision of the end days, and we’re told it has been captured forever on a photographic plate. Only Russell doesn’t show us the scene. Accompanying his verbal description is this quick pencil sketch:

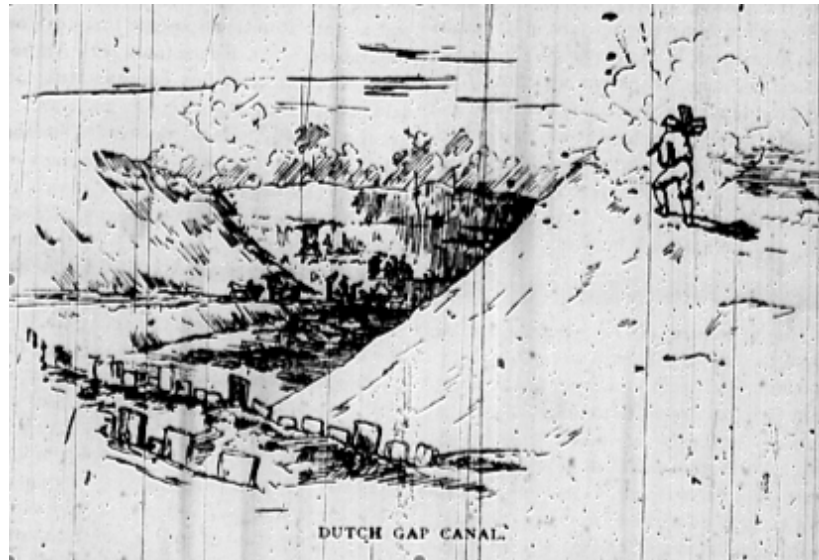


Figure 39: Russell, *Dutch Gap Canal*, 1882.⁵⁹

In some ways it is a sublimely nationalistic image of heroism, a lone photographer struggling at his trade, the smoke and dirt of an exploded shell obscuring his vision, enemy troops hard at their deadly work, in the distance. But I think what captures the eye, and what Russell must have been at pains to include in this sketch, are the tombstones that occupy the left foreground of the picture. They are crooked, jagged, hurriedly thrown up. If Russell's prose tells us that the photographer has cheated death, his drawing seems to be more about striking a Faustian deal with mortality, the photographer's life spared only in order to capture death, to preserve it with his camera, forever. It's an obsession, and a concession, that he seems to have been trying to work out of his system ever since that first panorama. Indeed, the panorama's reviewer couldn't wipe the images of dead and dying horses—truly, innocents caught in a human war—from his eyes, and he nearly begged for relief.

The horses, with their glittering caparisons, are true to the life, strong and powerful, pictured in the extremes of animated action, from the frenzied rush of fright to the dying struggle; and as mangled and torn by the shells they rush from point to point with despair written in every nerve, the beholder every moment looks to see them plunge to the earth, to close their struggles in death.⁶⁰

Perhaps the starkest of Russell's wartime photos come not from the field of battle, but from the places that were once teeming, thriving centers of vitality, from his land- and cityscapes. Russell focused his camera lens, with an almost morbid obsessiveness, on the ravaged streets of Richmond, forcing us to consider that thing so unnaturally haunting: a city bled of its people. There are any number of ways that he could have chosen to take his photos: triumphally, with a Union soldier waving the U.S. flag atop a captured arms depot; hopefully, as grey and blue come together to rebuild; nationalistically, with commerce humming along despite the war. But instead he chose empty streets, occluded by rubble, gutted buildings whose misanthropic hostility is emphasized by the careful placement of two lone individuals standing beneath an ironic lamppost—what will it cast its light upon? He chose a view that a decade before would have evoked pastoral associations of harmony, with its gently curving river making its way between factories and under the graceful arch of a stone bridge. But this isn't a peaceful picture, as the weeping willow occupying the center of the frame suggests: the streets are empty, and the jagged ruins of a mill jut skyward, a sort of bitterly half-strangled laugh mocking the convention of seeing industry and nature as essentially concordant. He chose to reveal the ultimate result of war, a soldier's cemetery in Alexandria, Virginia metaphorically cluttered with atrophied branches, perhaps trimmed from the leafless trees lurking in the picture. Not even the huge alabaster cross occupying center frame, nor the geometrically perfect rows of gravestones, can overcome the chaotic detritus littering the ground. And he chose to photograph a ruined paper mill and railroad bridge, creating a jumbled image whose artistic play of shape and light would be beautiful if it were not also evidence of the annihilation of both modern language and transportation, mute immobility in the aftermath of a shell's explosion.



Figure 40 (left): Russell, No title, 1865. Courtesy Library of Congress.⁶¹

Figure 41 (right): Russell, No title, 1865. Courtesy Library of Congress.⁶²



Figure 42: Russell, *Soldiers' Cemetery, Alexandria, Va.*, c. 1861-c.1865. Library of Congress.⁶³



Figure 43: Russell, *Ruins of Paper Mill and Railroad Bridge, Richmond*, c. 1865. Library of Congress.⁶⁴

The audience shifted in its seat, impatient for the main act to begin, as the man giving the introduction labored on: “speaking from the expressed judgment of others, I can say our programme has given great satisfaction, drawn large audiences, and,” he chuckled, “paid well”; the air in the theater was heating up, slowly growing staler, thicker with the scent of wool overcoats and after-dinner eructation, the clinging smells soaked up from the home hearth, and yet, every intake of air brought with it a taut expectation of what was to come, keenly whetting the hunger to feast one’s eyes, to be enchanted by the views, an almost sinful, Golden Calf iconophilia whose desire would not be satisfied by the meager fare of words alone thrilled through the room, and no matter how hard the man in front worked to craft his net of words, it inevitably remained futile to snare an audience yearning for something more—the audience and the speaker all knew it. But on he went, it now seemed, interminably: “these views are from the collection of Professor Sedgwick, a magnificent collection embracing upwards of 2000 splendid scenes—mountains and prairies, Indians and Mormons, both of our great oceans, trees that delight with terrify in their great dizzying height...they contain all of our country west of the Missouri, and are used by the good Professor, as transparencies in his Illuminated Lectures ‘Across the Continent’”—the audience knew all of this already, they were here at an Illuminated Lecture, after all, and didn’t need to be reminded of the fact—“The characteristic feature of these lectures consists in presenting to the eye with life-like distinction the important features of our continent...The Professor is doing a great work in this, his avocation, bringing to the people the resources, grandeurs & beauties of Our Western World.”⁶⁵

After a bit more laboring in this vein, at the point when the audience’s open-mouthed impatience threatened to froth over, the Professor himself took the stage, commanded that the lights be extinguished, and began.

This was the moment when an uncanny feeling took hold: total strangers rubbing shoulders in intimate darkness, the entire audience hunching forward as one, a room full of individuals reduced to starving eyes, time dissolving into a single expectant moment...and then the first lantern slide burst through the dark and exploded onto the screen, scrambling space and time, an illuminated revelation; there was nothing quite like this first instant: a picture carried on the limelight appeared out of the ether, and a gasp of delight filled the hall, but after a fleeting second it was the image itself, rather than the spectacle of projection, enchanting the crowd, at which point Professor Sedgwick usually said something to the effect that his proprietary process of making lantern slides literally had the power to transport his audience, bodily, across the U.S., but they didn't need to hear this: they felt it.

*Sedgwick continued: "Of course these images before you are only as good as the photographer who took them, a veteran of our late crisis whose photographs did so much to illuminate the terrible cost of war, a man who is now foremost among the landscape photographers in this country, Captain A.J. Russell."*⁶⁶ *But no one ever listened.*

*There's something about projected images, ones that are nourished on a real light source: they have warmth, a glow, an inner fire that can only be described as lively. If emitted light, the light of a flame, say, is hypnotic, encourages fantasy or reverie, then filtering that light through a glass-bound image has the power to enchant.*⁶⁷ *These images have a passionate attraction, and whole lives can be lived in the long instant it takes to marvel over things that are both reality and art.*⁶⁸ *Even the most literary in the crowd gathered together that night, even those for whom books were best friends or important mentors, even they felt the desire, the burning need to look, the very act confirming the audience's collective sense of being in the world with fellow humans, of the joy of living, of the pleasure of scrying—an archaic term linked*

with sorcery, an act of seeing which comes to seem more like a voyage.⁶⁹ After all, both seeing and organic life itself depend upon the play of light.⁷⁰

Tonight's was the third lecture in the Across the Continent series, the one entitled "Weber Canyon; Mormons and the Great Salt Lake City" and though many in the audience were no doubt drawn by the notoriety of polygamy that seemed to attach itself to anything having to do with Brigham Young's acolytes, in the end these photos wound up disappointing. There was nothing, really, in the lantern slides that proved titillating, or that even identified the people pictured as Mormon. There were a few showing a single man surrounded by multiple wives, but really, most of them could have been of any western pioneer. The landscape views, though...there really wasn't any way to describe them. The crispness of detail. The great depth, which rendered every rock, every scrubby bush in hyper-real detail. This was the sort of thing that one could get lost in, and some in the audience did. Above all, there was clarity. An atmospheric sense of capaciousness blowing in from the images, ventilating the stuffy room with a sharp Western lightness. When the limelight flickered, the images came alive, they actually moved.

As the only half-heard lecture animatedly leaped on, as the audience thrilled to Russell's images along the route traveled by Sedgwick's narrative, as they rested briefly under the shade of the 1000 Mile Tree, passed through the astonishing Tunnel No. 3—an anonymous void blasted clear through the side of a mountain—down Devil's Gate and past his Slide, and eventually pulled in to Salt Lake City, they, one and all, felt the exhilaration and exhaustion of travel in their bones. When the lights came up, they sat for a while, full of new memories that did and did not belong to each one individually, new experiences that were both real and fantastic at the same time.

“While giving my Illuminated Lectures, ‘Across the Continent,’” Sedgwick concluded, “I have been frequently asked, ‘Why do you not write your description of each picture and give the public a book of your observations?’ A moment’s reflection will furnish an answer. A description, minutely and accurately written, whatever its commercial value, would fail to convey to the mind an image like that made by the photograph addressed to the eye.”⁷¹

But the crowd was too charmed to hear his words.

6.

While Russell had been busy taking pictures of prideful generals and fallen trains, the mangled dead and lifeless cities, workers for the Union and Central Pacific railroads had been busily preparing to hammer their railroads’ tracks across the continent. Congress passed the Pacific Railway Act in 1862, and by the end of the war the gangs had begun work, ready to apply construction lessons learned during wartime to annihilating the distance separating the Mississippi from the Pacific Ocean. The end of the war found Russell back in New York, painting landscapes and panoramas of, among other things, explorations of the polar seas, and Dr. Livingston’s travels in Africa.⁷² But soon thereafter—I’m guessing Haupt engineered the move—the Union Pacific hired Russell as its official photographer. Loading up his photographic gear and heading west in the summer of 1868, Russell began making hundreds of photographs, starting in Wyoming, which eventually found publication in a variety of books, advertisements, and stereoscopic collections, though probably the most widely distributed was *The Great West Illustrated* (1869).⁷³

It’s an amazing work, *The Great West Illustrated*, and when it gets hauled from the cool depths of an archive, like the New York Public Library’s, and lies expectantly on the table, it’s

hard not to marvel at the sheer beauty of the book itself, it's heft, and it's size—12"x18". Before cracking the first page and discovering the golden plates within, you can tell by its cover that it is a testament to one of the great engineering triumphs of the nineteenth century, something more than an advertisement for the Union Pacific, something intended to durably celebrate the remarkable feat of spanning a continent. "Published by Authority of the Union Pacific Railroad Company," intones the opening page, before continuing in the preface,

...few persons, and only a small number of Scientific Expeditions, have traversed the Great Central Belt, and its History, Geography, and Geology are almost unknown. It is therefore believed that the information contained in this Volume, and which will be continued in those that follow, is calculated to interest all classes of people, and to excite the admiration of all reflecting minds as the colossal grandeur of the Agricultural, Mineral, and Commercial resources of the West are brought to view.⁷⁴

Even the decorative sketches that grace each page—naturalized little locomotives that descend from the extreme right and left of each page, like the chubby cherubim that inhabit classical allegorical painting—seem to set the stage for a corpus of photographs that we expect to be self congratulatory. But instead, we get images such as *Malloy's Cut* and *On the Mountains of the Green River*.



Figure 44: Russell, *Malloy's Cut*, 1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.⁷⁵

Malloy's Cut hems in our vision, directing it towards the background where the rails disappear around the far right corner of the embankment. Besides that lone knob, there is not much, save the solitary figure, for our eye to fix on, and he offers us little; he is turned away from us in a $\frac{3}{4}$ pose, the classic position meant to suggest veiling, mystery, incomprehensibility.⁷⁶ The text, too, seems unable to provide us any narrative clues beyond the purely extraneous: "The road here is cut through a mass of disintegrated granite. Malloy's Cut is situated two miles east of Sherman's Station, the summit of the Union Pacific Railroad."⁷⁷ Even this shard feel literally disconnected

from the image: it appears in the annotated table of contents, separated from *Malloy's Cut* by nine massive pages.⁷⁸ In some ways Russell's photograph recalls photographer John Carbutt's 1866 stereograph, titled *Westward the Monarch Capital Makes its Way*. It's an image of the Union Pacific's president—what better symbol of capital's ruling autocrat?—Samuel Reed standing alone on railroad ties moments away from having rails laid on top of them. It could be a gently critical image: Reed could be abandoned in the vast space—but I don't read it that way.



Figure 45: John Carbutt, *Westward the Monarch Capital Makes Its Way*, 1866. Courtesy Library of Congress.⁷⁹

Whereas Russell's camera is jammed between the rails and the confining banks of the Malloy's Cut, Carbutt's camera is placed completely in the center of the track and we have an infinite view to the horizon. It's certainly an image that emphasizes space, but it seems that the converging lines of the unfinished railroad grade give our eye forward, westward direction. The tools needed for construction, metonyms for work, are scattered about Reed: a shovel stands at attention off to the left and a gauge used to measure and align the proper distances between the rails lies at his feet. The President is turned half away from us, almost the only person in sight,

and I read him as intended to represent the master of all he surveys, the lone individual who, according to nothing but his own genius, has pulled himself up by the bootstraps and conquered a continent, the man out ahead of the pack on the raw, unfinished edge of Progress, laying rails for the future. I read it as an image that affirms the triumph of a single person's hard work at the same time that it encourages us to grab hold of the shovel and bend our backs to the glorious work of winning the West.⁸⁰ And he's not truly alone, for off to the left—all but invisible without the aid of a stereo viewer, are two people on foot and another on horseback. It could be that Carbutt is turned towards them: he certainly seems to be looking in their direction, directing them or awaiting the information they bring.



Figure 46: Detail from John Carbutt, *Westward the Monarch Capital Makes Its Way*.

But Russell's solitary character hemmed in at Malloy's Cut invites no such camaraderie: he seems lost in a tide of wistful lonesomeness, handicapped, isolated by his own individualism.



Figure 47: Russell, *On the Mountains of Green River*, 1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.⁸¹

A few pages farther on in *The Great West Illustrated*, we come to *On the Mountains of the Green River*, as open and airy as *Malloy's Cut* is claustrophobic. Russell has posed three men and three women on the edge of a butte while the camera seems to hang in mid air, a disembodied view in which the audience remains outside of the frame: omniscient, third-person voyeurs watching something unfold. The text seems woefully out of place, like it was meant for another image: "The standpoint for this view is nearly two thousand feet above the Railroad, which can be seen, winding through the bottom lands, three miles away; farther off can be seen the dim outline of Green River City. This town is built of unburnt brick, and when this view was taken contained two thousand inhabitants." If the caption hadn't called these details of human settlement to our attention they would be all but invisible, swallowed by distance and collodion. In both *Malloy's Cut* and *On the Mountains of the Green River*, Russell has framed his images so

that natural features trump human agency: there is nowhere for the lone figure standing beside the tracks in *Malloy's Cut* to go, no place to find asylum. The three couples in *On the Mountains of the Green River* literally seem poised on the brink of the world's edge, stranded with little chance of descending to safety, far beyond the life-sustaining river, or actual railroad—the putative star of the show.

7.

In the best photographs, there's a shock of the new. They confront us in some way, force us to look carefully with new eyes. Or they simply work into our souls, enticing us to return to them again and again, looking for new revelations. Some are pleasurable, others cut; some are inviting, others repulse; some are calm, others violent. But every good photo asks something of its viewers: photos, too, have desires, if only to be gazed at. They ask that we not only inhabit our own individual spaces, and not only the space of the image, but the space in between, the space in between subject and object, real and fantastic, fact and meaning, prose and poetry. That meeting ground, on territory that is neither the photograph's nor the audience's but a kind of common space, is a place where meaning making happens in a dialogue between viewer and image. When we look closely, we do so because we expect to find some sort of meaning—which is different than the desire for explanation: we expect communication. This is the space of revelation.⁸²

One of the things that makes Russell's photographs so enchanting—then as now—is that he wasn't blindly taking snapshots of whatever struck his fancy. He had to work for them: loading hundreds of pounds of gear onto recalcitrant mules, each animal an individual Russell had to get to know in order to proceed on some of his longer photographic rambles; carrying

gallons of pure water—in one case for seventy miles—not for drinking, but to slake the delicate thirst of his living images, for whom the alkaline desert water would spell death.⁸³ And then, to make a photo actually required, at the bare minimum, half an hour of unpacking equipment, preparing the glass, exposing film, and developing.⁸⁴ You can see, one hundred and forty years later, intention deliberately thrumming its way through his images, but the meanings are never apparent. We have to work for them.

As one of the first wave of western landscape photographers, Russell was on the very cutting edge of artistic photographic aesthetics, borrowing, quoting from the dominant conventions, shaping them to fit his own vision.⁸⁵ He had been, ever since he first set paintbrush to canvas.⁸⁶ By the nineteenth century, there were three main tropes available for Russell to frame his landscapes: the sublime, picturesque, and beautiful. There's a danger of overschematizing aesthetics here, even in marking them out as separate things. The danger is compounded by the fact that artists often blur the distinctions between each, shaping and reforming each category, and so confound, tease, and delight an audience's expectations. What's more, the boundaries setting off aesthetic categories from each other are pretty fuzzy: each convention shades into the others very quickly.

Nevertheless, there are generally recognizable distinctions between categories, then as now—as well as all sorts of distinctions within them. The distinctions are important to discern because with them comes an implicit body of ethics, an implicit notion of what is valuable about the world, what belongs in it, which actions are virtuous and which debauched. And so the sublime is about power, domination, forceful silencing, and separation.⁸⁷ Edmund Burke, the Anglo-Irish statesman and philosopher most associated with the sublime, thrilled to things that challenged his very survival, and in the mid-eighteenth-century, he began to theorize that a brush

with annihilation provided the titillating impact of sublimity. “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger,” wrote Burke, “whatever is in any sort terrible...is a source of the *sublime*.”⁸⁸ This is the twist: the sublime, for its power, depends not on human might, but powerlessness, it depends on nature reducing its human audience to a wriggling insignificance. If there’s a silencing, it’s of the human voice; if there’s domination, it’s the awesomeness of nature’s complexity and sheer might over simple, weak human dust motes. For Burke, the sublime was always outside the human body, always alien, it inhered in the physical landscape, but was always capable of forcing its way into the puny world of human affairs, demonstrating our inferiority. With a proverbial flick of the wrist, a sadistic nature could wring all kinds of exquisite agony from its delicate subject. General darkness and obscurity, manifestations of great power, the threat of privation, vastness, infinitude, great difficulty, magnificence, great light, loud or unfamiliarly terrible noises, bitter smells and awful stench, pain: these were the characteristics most calculated to cause the sort of astonishment that could shock a person out of his own sense of security and trigger feelings of the sublime.⁸⁹

If the sublime is about the vastness and dominance of a nonhuman nature, the picturesque is concerned with harmony. Most eloquently theorized in the late-eighteenth-century by Englishman William Gilpin, picturesqueness rests on a harmonious combination of seemingly dissonant factors, Nature and Art. Neither is solely material, but the phenomenal expression of an ideal, and such landscapes expressed a sympathetic reconciliation between humans and the natural world. Picturesque views were those that were pleasing to the eye, and offered a vision of perfection. Such views were never entirely natural, nor artificial, but a beguiling mixture of both—the term arboriculture seems appropriate, not in its current definition (the growing and management of trees for the capitalist market), but in its literal meaning: a mix of wild woodland

and human culture. Uvedale Price, a vocal participant in the English aesthetics debate of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, framed the picturesque this way: though it was a visual aesthetic, closely related to painting, in the end, human-made images were simply not enough. Neither were actual physical landscapes. Instead, for Price, whose notion of picturesqueness is bound up with a belief in the imperative to improve, at the same time, both nature and society, the great power of picturesque images is that they were a mediating dialog, always incomplete and in need of cultivation, between Nature and human culture. Always a bit of an abstraction, the picturesque was not so much an image of how things were, as much as what they could be, a projected image of the good life. Form, lightness, balance: these are the crucial factors, and without all three, a landscape may be interesting, or even beautiful, but it can never be picturesque.⁹⁰

Finally, the beautiful was that thing which had “that quality or those qualities...which...cause love, or some passion similar to it.” Picturesqueness could reside in ugly things, as long as they fit into the landscape: ruins, graveyards, or shipwrecks could all work if they blended well. But beauty was reserved for those things that were, well, beautiful.⁹¹ Burke is at great pains to make it clear that this love is not a possessive one, the sort of thing that he calls desire or lust; rather, beauty-love triggers appreciation, acceptance of difference, and nothing more. There’s a one-on-one intimacy here, a tree you can hug, and a sort of morality: hugging beautiful things is virtuous. As the nineteenth-century’s most influential American landscape painter, Thomas Cole, put it, there was an indissoluble link between the beautiful and the good.

Russell was clearly aware of these visual conventions, and throughout his landscapes he develops techniques of framing topographical features to most dramatically highlight the

interaction of nature and human culture. Though he doesn't seem as interested in the beautiful, he's constantly refining and redeveloping his takes on the picturesque and sublime. We see this in *Malloy's Cut*—a sort of problem picturesque in which the possibility of harmony is denied (an aesthetic paradox!) in which an engulfing silence and sense of abandonment reigns. It's the same aesthetic at work in his Civil War image of the destroyed mill and languid stream in Richmond and in *On the Mountains of the Green River*, a photograph whose emotional power pivots on the resistance of landscape to human sustenance. The problem-picturesque is perhaps most forcefully at work in one of Russell's more famous photographs, *Hanging Rock, Foot of Echo Canon*, another image that appeared first in *The Great West Illustrated*.



Figure 48: Russell, *Hanging Rock, Foot of Echo Canon*, 1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.⁹²

The annotated table of contents directs us, “This mass of conglomerate rock, overhanging its base nearly fifty feet, and forms the foundation of a bluff nearly one thousand feet in height. It Overlooks Echo City. The Union Pacific Railroad winds around the bluff’s base. From its top

can be viewed some of the grandest scenery on the road.”⁹³ This verbal description, of course, tells us nothing, and instead almost demands that we look at the photograph, try to find its meaning visually rather than textually.

What’s immediately striking to me about *Hanging Rock* is the great detail of the geological features compared to the built environment. In the large albumen print, it seems as if we can see every pebble that makes up the conglomerate dominating the view, while the house, barn, and outbuildings in the background seem almost generic. We can literally contemplate the vast geologic age of the world set against an evanescent human settlement. Again, Russell has posed a lone figure in the scene; again, he turns away from our enquiring eye. The photograph vibrates with catastrophic visual tension, and if one gives oneself over to the photo’s visual logic, the large stone is only moments away from tumbling down—unable to support its own unbalanced weight—not only upon the hapless sitter urged to go west and grow up with the country, but visually crushing out the small settlement as well, snuffing out the dream of Western expansion.⁹⁴

Of course, we moderns can easily critique Burke, Gilpin, Price, Cole and the artists who modified their aesthetics, like Russell: they’re hopelessly paternalistic, upper-class, white, and western, and their work can be tallied up as instances of an over-idealized, simplified, a-historical, modern flight from reality, one that greenwashes the social and environmental impacts of human industry.⁹⁵ The eighteenth-century theorists and their later followers sometimes seem to have that old-fashioned Enlightenment confidence that they’ve discovered bedrock, unyielding principles, that cocksureness bordering dangerously on hubris, which needs to be questioned. There’s something to this: no aesthetic is simple, no aesthetic means exactly what it says, and one can find dozens of picturesque, beautiful, or sublime views used to disguise

environmental degradation and social control. Take Cole, who linked beauty to goodness: we can ask, whose idea of beauty? Whose idea of the good? In a more contemporary context, we can level the same critique at Ansel Adams. He's a master of the sublime, but there's a triumphal nationalism to his photos—only in America does there exist a Yosemite—a sort of self-satisfied sense of well-being that is accepting of anyone who professes to love the wild. An Adams photograph hung in the expensively decorated corporate meeting room of a multinational oil company doesn't necessarily screech cognitive dissonance, because Adams's own deployment of the sublime wasn't much of a critique of exploitation in the first place.⁹⁶ That multinational oil company could very well be a corporate sponsor of the Sierra Club, and support for preservation is really all Adams asks. We should be skeptical.

But what we risk, and too often miss with such critiques, is the deep, though imperfect, humility that the sublime, picturesque, and beautiful have often allowed artists to struggle toward. It's not so much that the conventions in and of themselves are to blame, but the way they are sometimes used. The problem comes when we critics blindly accept such rousing adages as, "a working country is hardly ever a landscape," as gospel truth, even when there has been voluminous scholarly work, beginning in many cases with Gilpin, Cole, Burke, and Price themselves, asserting exactly the opposite.⁹⁷ The problem is that if we simply discard Western aesthetic conventions as always-already corrupt, we lose entire constellations of critique, dissent, negotiation, and not incidentally...beauty.⁹⁸

And that's too high a price to pay.

If it's true that any of these aesthetics can be appropriated for the purposes of accommodation, then it's also worth noting that aesthetics are not enslaved to any one ideology,

no one unilaterally controls how an aesthetic is used, how it privileges one view over another.⁹⁹ That, I think, is one of the things that makes art always mysterious.

What's more, there's a raw current of resistance running through many formulations of these visual aesthetics. The very notion of the sublime, of an infinitely powerful nature, can mock any arrogant pretension at controlling nature and has the potential to unseat simplistic notions of land as only either private property or as a bank of natural resources simply awaiting eager '49ers. If one agrees with Burke's conception, then the sublime, because it inheres in the natural world, can be a way of letting nature in, a way of valuing land not for its economic potential, but for its ability to make us *feel*, for its ability to make us human even as it denies our self-importance.¹⁰⁰ "I cannot describe," wrote Russell, from Utah, "the feelings of a person when first stepping from the green carpet of grass nourished by midsummer sun upon this great winter born snow bank. At first it does not seem a reality but when you step out upon it, feel its crisp beneath the feet, and realize the change of atmosphere, it is delightful and exhilarating in the extreme...From the snow bank I can see nearly one hundred miles to the north-east and west, but to the south, south-east, and south-west vast ranges of mountains shut in everything beyond. I do not know which to admire the most."¹⁰¹ Moving from a landscape of growth and nourishment to one of hardship and coldness, from life to death, having his vision at once let out and hemmed in, reanimated Russell. He was reborn, in a sense, through his helplessness. He saw delight. And so the sublime brought with it a radical revaluation of places normally deemed wastelands: crags, mountains, chasms, great winter born snow banks—howling wildernesses standing in the way of human Progress, fit only for the devil. With the emergence and popularity of the sublime, suddenly mountains seemed to have an intrinsic value, cliffs a thrilling, necessary aspect of otherness.¹⁰²

When Gilpin promotes the “harmony of parts,” in his picturesque, he’s playing on the reconciling of opposites: harmony means concord, and one can almost feel him wince at dissonant strains invading the landscape, for harmony can’t be pushed too far.¹⁰³ There’s a passage at the very end of the first volume of *Remarks on Forest Scenery* remarkable for its full-throated condemnation of early capitalism, and it’s written as a sort of history of the world, but from the point of view of an Old Testament God angered at how those created in his likeness have fouled their nest.

But though man had deserted the forest as a dwelling, and had left it to be inhabited by beasts, it soon appeared that he had no intention of giving up his right of dominion over it. In a course of ages, as population increased, he began to find it in his way. In one part, it occupied grounds fit for his plow; in another, for the pasturage of his domestic cattle; and in some parts, it afforded shelter for his enemies. He soon shewed the beasts they were only tenants at will. He began, amain, to lay about him with his axe. The forest groaned, and receded from its ancient bounds. It is amazing what ravages he made in his original habitation through every quarter of the globe. The fable was realized: man begged of the forest a handle to his hatchet; and, when he had obtained the boon, he used it in felling the whole.

Gilpin, the man who has leisurely taken us through three hundred and fifty pages of pleasant musings on beautiful trees, cannot hide his wrath at the destruction dwelt to the world’s picturesque woodlands: “In very early days, this devastation began. When Joshua divided the Land of Promise among the Israelites,” and again, “The mighty forest of Lebanon, which once found employment for eighty thousand hewers, is now dwindled to a dozen trees.... The woods which covered the island of Delos had entirely disappeared.... In all the new peopled parts of America...it is astonishing what devastation the woods of these countries have suffered.... In the West Indies.... In Barbadoes.... In the East Indies...wherever settlement has been made, the woods have been cut down.”¹⁰⁴

And the beautiful, too, can bring with it not just the protectiveness of love, but, Cole wrote, the deeply ethical, democratic imperatives of enjoyment. “The spirit of our age,” he wrote

in his *Essay on American Scenery*, “is to contrive but not to enjoy—toiling to produce more toil—accumulating in order to aggrandize.” Instead of leading lives of quiet desperation, Cole argued, we needed to open our eyes to the beauty that surrounds: “he who looks on nature with a ‘loving eye,’ cannot move from his dwelling without the salutation of beauty...The delight such a man experiences is not merely sensual, or selfish...he feels a calm religious tone steal through his mind, and when he has turned to mingle with his fellow men, the chords which have been struck in that sweet communion cease not to vibrate.”¹⁰⁵ Beauty, the appreciation of natural beauty, will bring us into a social communion not only with our fellow humans, but with the nonhuman, non-rational world, as well.

Rather than simply regurgitating received aesthetic conventions from the eighteenth-century, or retroactively confirming the current academic critique of landscape artists as unavoidably enthralled with Progress, Russell transforms the sublime and the picturesque according to his own vision. Irony seems to be the dominant trope at work in his images, but not the snide irony of privilege, nor the dramatic irony in which the audience knows more than the characters of the drama. Russell’s irony is a destabilizing, leveling, subversive one, and he refuses to comply with celebratory aesthetics, *especially* when he’s on the payroll of the Union Pacific.¹⁰⁶ He ushers private moments—hence all the solitary figures in his images—into the light, those ambivalent pauses when men and women apprehensively contemplate space, Progress, the future and the present.¹⁰⁷

To be sure, not all of the photographs in *The Great West* are as unsettling as *Malloy’s Cut*, *On the Mountains of the Green River*, and *Hanging Rock, Foot of Echo Canon*. Russell pictures the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, the picturesquely named Death’s Rock, Hanging Rock, and Devil’s Gate. And not all of the photographs are so devoid of industry or

habitation. In plate 28, *Coal Beds of Bear River*, we get the first glimpse of the mineral wealth promised us by the preface.



Figure 49: Russell, *Coal Beds of Bear River* and detail, 1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.¹⁰⁸

But it is a haunted picture: we see four men, arrayed around the gaping mouth of the tunnel, and if one looks closely there is a spectral image of a headless miner just coming into the camera's vision from the depths of the tunnel. There is a technical explanation for this—without a specialized filter one cannot get perfect exposure of deep shadow and bright light at the same time, and one must prioritize either one or the other—but nonetheless, taken on its own, the photo literally shows us a miner's ghost and the costs of technological development. In plate 36, *Coalville, Weber Valley*, we see a father and his two children foregrounded before the settlement of sod-roofed and dugout cabins making up Coalville. The road through town is ridiculously outsized for the settlements, and the picture seems to attest to a culture that values movement and transience more than rootedness.¹⁰⁹ The title, *Coalville* clearly hearkens to the earlier photograph, *Coal Beds of Bear River*, and even visually, the emptiness of the settlement—it could be a ghost town—also recalls the haunted coal mine inhabited by a specter.



Figure 50: Russell, *Coalville, Weber Valley*, 1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.¹¹⁰

It is hard to read these photographs as only about the triumph of machinery over nature, the splendid domination of capitalism, and the blessedness of Empire's westward course—unless we privilege captions as the only bearers of meaning and the standard convention for reading text—left-to-right, front-to-back—as the best mode of visual consumption. Almost all of the photos that appear in *The Great West Illustrated* also appear in Ferdinand V. Hayden's *Sun Pictures of Rocky Mountain Scenery*. They also appear in stereographic sets, available for individual sale. They were used as lantern slides by Professor Sedgwick. They were used, in one of the most bizarre collections I've seen, as curiosities to help advertise George W. Williams and Co.'s Carolina Fertilizer. Even the titles and captions change. For instance, in *The Great West Illustrated's*, *Hanging Rock, Foot of Echo Canon* appears as *Hanging Rock: Echo City* in *Sun Pictures of Rocky Mountain Scenery*, and *Hanging Rock. 1000ft. High* in *Union Pacific R.R. Views*. The text accompanying *Hanging Rock 1000 Feet High* in the pages of the fertilizer company is this: "We have used the Carolina Fertilizer applied on poor land under Cotton, and are satisfied it will make a good yield, and compare favorably with Peruvian Guano. Our patrons express themselves highly pleased with the result of the Fertilizer, and say that it is equal to Peruvian Guano on same soil."¹¹¹ How, then do we talk about one stable meaning grafted onto an image by its surrounding text and its front-to-back order? Does the meaning of *Hanging Rock, Foot of Echo Canon* really change when its caption becomes *Hanging Rock: Echo City* in *Sun Pictures of Rocky Mountain Scenery*? How do we read the same image that shows up in *Sun Pictures of Rocky Mountain Scenery*, *The Great West Illustrated*, and as an advertisement for guano? Either we argue that photos are essentially meaningless, mere illustrations to play with as we please, or we pay as close attention to them as cultural phenomena in and of themselves, read

them as closely as we can, offer the best interpretation possible while at the same time try to acknowledge their ultimate mystery.¹¹²

Those original words, which opened *The Great West*—that these photos are “calculated...to excite the admiration of all reflecting minds as the colossal grandeur of the Agricultural, Mineral, and Commercial resources of the West come into view”—seem weirdly off the mark, as if they describe some other book filled with Currier and Ives lithographs. The view of the world Russell has made for us is one in which agriculture is absent, and settlement either vanishes in the vast distance, is unpopulated, or in danger of being crushed by an inhospitable environment. The extractive industries—grubbing for those mineral resources—exchange miners’ lives for riches. And the rooted commercial prospects seem simply non-existent, or as in the photograph of *Coalville*, abandoned, packed up and headed down that wide, fine road toward the next main chance.

Sometimes the boosters shout the loudest, and it’s hard to hear all the voices of the unsure over the racket. Yet, Russell wasn’t alone, *The Great West Illustrated* is not anomalous, and anxiety about the juggernaut of Progress was in at least as plentiful a supply as confidence.¹¹³ “We do not ride on the railroad,” wrote Thoreau, fifteen years before Russell took his camera out west, in the section of *Walden* entitled “Where I Lived, and What I lived For,” “it rides upon us”:

Did you ever think what those sleepers are that underlie the railroad? Each one is a man, an Irishman, or a Yankee man. The rails are laid on them, and they are covered with sand, and the cars run smoothly over them. They are sound sleepers, I assure you. And every few years a new lot is laid down and run over; so that, if some have the pleasure of riding on a rail, others have the misfortune to be ridden upon...I am glad to know that it takes a gang of men for every five miles to keep the sleepers down and level in their beds as it is, for this is a sign that they may sometime get up again.¹¹⁴

Henry George, one of the late-nineteenth-century's most influential social critics, wrote from his perch in the San Francisco of 1868, as he watched the train's tracks slowly and surely heading west, "the completion of the railroad and the consequent great increase of business and population, will not be a benefit to all of us.... As a general rule...those who *have* it will make wealthier; for those who *have not*, it will make it more difficult to get."¹¹⁵ And in 1874 the editors of the popular mainstream journal, *Harper's Weekly*, envisioned the railroad as literally visiting destruction upon a generic western town, Anywhere, U.S.A, leaving it bare except for the wolves, one of which gnaws on a human bone—an image that echoes George's indictment, "the locomotive is a great centralizer. It kills little towns and builds up great cities."¹¹⁶ It's imagery that echoes *Coalville's* desolation row.



Figure 51: *Harper's Weekly*, *Busted!—A Deserted Railroad Town in Kansas*, 1874.¹¹⁷

Russell's photos may have even worked their subtle mesmeric charm on others, transmuting what was supposed to be celebration into critique. Explorer Ferdinand V. Hayden's *Sun Pictures of Rocky Mountain Scenery* (1870)—illustrated with 30 of Russell's photographs, including *1000 Mile Tree*—is often read as a tract promoting the settlement of the West: Hayden certainly intended it to be.¹¹⁸ Ever since 1853, Hayden had been wandering west of the Mississippi in search of fossils, making maps, and codifying the geology of the region. In 1867, he began the first of many large government-funded surveys, and it is notable that on this first one, made of Nebraska's natural resources, one of Hayden's conclusions was that Nebraskans should plant more trees, for foliage would bring rain and prosperity. In 1869, Hayden, like Russell, was following the line of the Union Pacific, making notes on the economic potential of the West, and out of this adventure came his *Sun Pictures of Rocky Mountain Scenery*.¹¹⁹ Most everything that the explorer writes in *Sun Pictures* is a breathless account of the riches awaiting settlement: "vast quantities of pine" are available for lumbering and he points out to those thirsting for profit that "one gentleman alone has a contract for 550,000 [railroad] ties." He even prophesies a future in which cities grow from the spores of the small farms and villages dotting the west.¹²⁰ Hayden was entirely ordinary in this sentiment, and echoed tourist and writer W.L. Humason who, himself a spokesperson for the conventional, set off on his transcontinental journey only four days before the final spike was driven at Promontory Point and was stirred to lofty rhetorical flights of nationalism: "the vast domain protected by this Nation's flag...a land laved by three oceans, embosoming innumerable wide spread lakes and sending forth its rocky, snow-capped peaks to battle with the clouds." Humason continued:

In less than ten years, travelers passing over these roads, will find villages and cities scattered along the whole distance from Omaha to San Francisco. The plains will be dotted with thousands of farm houses; the mountains will become places of summer resort; and even the sage-brush [which seems to be his great nemesis], in many

portions of the great upland desert, will disappear before the fertilizing streams of water which man's ingenuity and industry will cause to flow down from distant mountains, and through the arid plains, enriching and beautifying on their way.¹²¹

But there is a great break in *Sun Pictures*, a divide in the watershed, and what comes after seems to flow to an entirely different conclusion than what came before. Hayden's mentor, the geologist J.S. Newberry, contributed the final chapter to *Sun Pictures*, and though it begins innocuously enough as a disquisition on America's ancient lakes, by the end it is unequivocally at odds with Hayden's prose. "Life and beauty were everywhere [in the Tertiary Age]," Newberry writes, "and man, the great destroyer, had not yet come." In words that strongly call to mind Thomas Cole's famous series of paintings, *The Course of Empire*—in which a primeval state of nature yields to the pastoral, the fully urban and civilized, through a period of internecine destruction, and on into an uninhabited lonely desolation—Newberry writes:

The cities that now stand upon their [the Great Lakes] shores will...have grown colossal in size, then gray with age, then have fallen into decadence and their sites be long forgotten, but in the sediments that are now accumulating in these lake-basins will lie many a wreck and skeleton, tree-trunk and floated leaf. Near the city sites and old river mouths these sediments will be full of relics that will illustrate and explain the mingled comedy and tragedy of human life. These relics the geologist of the future will doubtlessly gather and study and moralize over, as we do the records of the Tertiary ages. Doubtless he will be taught the same lesson we are, that human life is infinitely short, and human achievement utterly insignificant. Let us hope that this future man, purer in morals and clearer in intellect than we, may find as much to admire in the records of this first epoch of the reign of man, as we do in those of the reign of mammals.¹²²

At the conclusion of these words, one flips the page and finds oneself face to face with Russell's photographs—most of which first appeared a year earlier in *The Great West Illustrated*. Paging through the series, the final plate, entitled *Hydraulic Gold Mining*, comes abruptly, a visual reference to Newberry's pessimistic take on the epoch of industrial capitalism, the long-accumulated sediments of past ages blasted apart in a mad scramble for a few glittering grains.



Figure 52: Russell, *Hydraulic Gold Mining*, c.1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.¹²³

Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher point out that the railroads were used to ship Geronimo and some of his fellow Chiracahua Apache east to army prisons in Florida in 1886—thus clearing the land, making it empty, opening it for settlement and development—while at the same time sending investment bankers and their venture capital west.¹²⁴ But Russell’s photo suggest that the wealth blasted from hillsides by machines and business combinations financed by that same Eastern money completed the circuit by heading back home to line the already plush pockets of the mine owners—who else could afford to invest in massive water cannons—leaving its native environs a shambles.¹²⁵

The first time I encountered one of Russell's photographs, I was sitting, riveted to my chair, in the reading room of Cornell's Olin Library; as I reflect back on that moment I understand that what transfixed me so was the tone arising from the 150-year-old images. As I slowly adjusted to my new surroundings, the new world that I inhabited after living in Russell's, as I got a sense of the landscape and found my bearings, I began to discover that there are visual motifs that appear and reappear throughout the canon of Russell's landscape photos—almost a sort of iconographic grammar—and that foremost among his visual narratives is a tendency to use peculiar landscape features as still-life witnesses to swarming, transient human activity.

In one of the more famous of his railroad photographs, *Citadel Rock: Green River Valley*, which appeared in multiple publications, Russell has captured a work gang as they replace a temporary wooden bridge with a permanent stone one, the massive column, Citadel Rock, that dominates the scene perhaps vouchsafing the bridge built of its own durable element.



Figure 53: Russell, *Temporary and Permanent Bridges, Citadel Rock, Green River*, c. 1864-1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.¹²⁶

But like many of Russell's photographs, this is a lonely scene, it's cold, and the stiff wind blowing from the right-hand side of the frame feels keen. The life-giving cylindrical form of the water tower is mocked by the stark landscape and the much larger, much grander tower of rock, which, though it shares the water tower's shape, shares none of its transience. In another photo, *Dial Rock, Red Buttes*, a photo that also made its way into numerous publications, including *The Great West Illustrated*, we see the impressive column of Dial Rock—named for its similarity to the shape of a sun dial—in the center of the picture, and on its right side, a small figure who, unsurprisingly, turns his back to us.¹²⁷





Figure 54: Russell, *Dial Rock, Red Buttes*, and detail, c. 1864-1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.¹²⁸

It looks like he's watching something: he's crouched behind the shoulder of the rock for protection or concealment, his gun a second away from being shouldered, aimed, and fired. The right side of the frame is where all the action is, and so one might overlook the horror on the photograph's left side: what looks to be the remains of a human ribcage, backbone and pelvis nestled amongst the left side of the outcropping, a formerly living human for whom Dial Rock was not protection, but tombstone.



Figure 55: Russell, *Dial Rock, Red Buttes*. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

One of the tensest photographs in *The Great West Illustrated*, and, indeed, in all of Russell's landscape photos, the drama has paused just a moment before its denouement: will the man on the right side carry the day, or will he wind up another pile of bones somewhere out on the lone prairie? Will the project of Manifest Destiny, of whom the lone character seems to be an agent, triumph, or will its time, too, run out at the foot of Dial Rock?

The permanent and the fleeting. Another photographer, from another time and place would write, "how do you free yourself from an obsession when you are a photographer, if not by photographing the object of obsession?"¹²⁹ Is it surprising that an artist with Russell's obsession, a photographer who had been initially mesmerized by the transience of human life, the foreverness of death, is it surprising that he was fixated on crucifixion, an event that, for Christians, at once embodied the permanence of heavenly salvation and the finitude of mortal flesh, eternal truth and flimsy corporal existence?



Figure 56: Russell, *Church Buttes*, c.1864-c.1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.¹³⁰

I'm not sure what *Church Buttes* means, and that's part of the reason I keep coming back to it. What is it that sanctifies the buttes: their form, their water-eroded buttresses? Or is it the telegraph pole on the left side of the frame, a detail conspicuously missing from Russell's other photographs of the same site? Is this an ironic photograph, one destabilized by the benediction of the secular pole, or should we read the buttes as inherently sacred, or even beatified by Samuel Morse's invention (is it important that Morse's first telegraphed dot-dash-dot denaturalized words over the contraption were "what hath God wrought," a hint of ambivalence creeping into the annihilator's voice? Is it important that Morse, too, was a photographer)?¹³¹ I'm inclined to read the once-living, partly-natural-partly-man-made telegraph pole and the surrounding buttes as suspended in tension with each other, a contest of meaning over the definition of godly, a

reading that is reinforced, I think, by the way the buttes dwarf the tiny party at their base. But I'm not sure.



Figure 57: Russell, *East Temple Street, Salt Lake City*, c.1864-c.1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.¹³²

East Temple Street, Salt Lake City, on the other hand, is an acrid joke. In a city, such as Salt Lake, a city settled by true believers, a city whose streets are named for their orientation to the Tabernacle, we see, occupying center frame, the by-now-familiar cruciform telegraph pole. But what's missing is a church, a temple, in fact *any* house of worship. Instead, we see storefronts stretching diagonally off into the distance, a hardware and drug store the most impressive edifice in the scene. It's the Gospel of Wealth, incarnated in a landscape, the replacement of a supreme being with the almighty dollar.

Perhaps it's too obvious, the visual rhyming of cross and telegraph pole, but as it turns out, crucifixion and trees—telegraph poles were once green, after all—have a long, intertwined iconographical and cultural history. Since the fourth century CE, at least, a crucified Christ has been equated with a living tree in full bloom, and indeed the Bible itself is filled with trees of

knowledge and trees of everlasting life, trees—or branches of them, anyway—testifying that God’s wrathful flood was abating, trees bursting into flame and speaking. Where the flesh-and-blood human body ends and the tree begins, where the metaphor of trunk and rebirth after a long winter cease to act simply as allegory and become objects of veneration has never been entirely clear. As Simon Schama points out, one of the most frequently occurring images in the Christian tradition is the reanimation of dead wood into living.¹³³ This cultural tradition even implants itself in the soil, where the *Arbor vitae*—literally the tree of life, an ornamental evergreen—beautifies the landscape.

And so we’re back at the beginning, thinking about a tree, looking at a telegraph pole, and wondering, what is it that *1000 Mile Tree* was witness to on that day in 1869? Why a crucifixion? What have we done?



The great power of Russell’s photograph is that he provides no clear answer. He resisted didacticism and instead made a photograph that engages the imagination, even 140 years after

plunging a glass plate into developer. There is an air of ultimate mysteriousness, “a mad image, chafed by reality,” as Roland Barthes puts it.¹³⁴

All images, all landscapes, misrepresent: there’s simply no way to capture the entire truth, the long history and deep context of a place, with *any* medium. Yet, this doesn’t mean that we need to throw up our hands in frustration and take refuge in a nihilistic criticism, insisting the images are unruly representations only knowable through textual chaperones. Though one point to keep in mind is that photographs are emphatically *not* perfectly objective windows into reality, what they show not necessarily what they mean, another is that what photos show cannot be divorced from what they mean.¹³⁵ Text can only go so far.¹³⁶ Appearances are all that they have to offer, and if, as Alan Trachtenberg has argued “the history [photographs] show is inseparable from the history they enact,” if form and meaning are indistinguishably intertwined, then if we’re to glean anything beyond empirical data from an image—who wore what, how many people were at the picnic—we must pay attention, we must struggle with the images themselves. For better or worse, images help guide us in our world, and some of these images, some misrepresentations are better, truer, more just than others.

When Russell captured the parallel graded beds of the Central and Union Pacific Railroads in the background of a photo ostensibly focused on the trestle-work at Promontory Point, he turned his camera into a witness that testified to waste and the political chicanery, for there was nothing “free market” about the completion of the transcontinental railroad. Congress gave away a four-hundred-foot right of way to the Central and Union Pacific Railroads, as well as ten square miles of land for every mile of track laid, and loans of \$16,000- \$48,000 dollars per mile, depending on how hilly the terrain was. In 1864, as U.S. and Confederate soldiers were slaughtering each other by the thousands, the railroads convinced the federal government to

patriotically double the amount of land granted per mile and to restructure the loans as mortgages, reducing the corporations' risk to nearly nothing, ensuring the corporations' owners vast profits. Since each corporation was paid—at society's expense—according to how many miles of track it laid, it made economic sense to overlap, and build two sections of track for twice the cost, even though only one of the beds would be used.¹³⁷ It was a boondoggle, and Russell preserved its trace on the land.



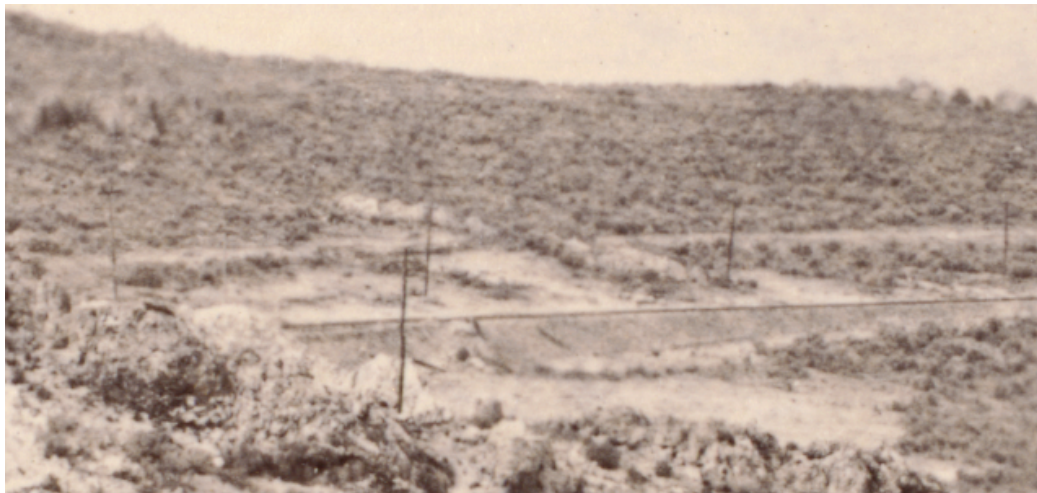


Figure 58: Russell, *Promontory Trestle Work*, and detail, c.1869. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.¹³⁸

His work often functions as investigative photojournalism and, indeed, much of its power comes from the emphatic statement, that this really happened: this blood spilled from this body onto this ground; these once familiar buildings are now reduced to haphazard piles of bricks, dust to dust; these corporations defrauded you.¹³⁹ Such images are certainly bad for morale and business: recall the recent Bush administration's ban on photojournalism that depicted dying or dead American soldiers, body bags or government-issue coffins, or the even more recent attempts to ban undercover journalists from capturing the animal abuses rampant on large industrial Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations.

Like the very best photojournalism, Russell's images are also interpretations, they are, always and finally, art. This tension between document and interpretation, between fact and meaning never gets resolved, and that, I think, is what makes his photographs worth getting lost in. There's something political about all this, something immediate that resists the attempt to wrap the dead in the sanctimonious mantle of higher cause and mystic chords of memory, something that asks the viewer to contend with tragedy, with Progress on a deeply personal level. When read alongside Russell's wartime photographs of bridges or trains, or the engineer Haupt

playacting the part of a General, his landscape photos point to the role that technology, that engineering, that hubris plays in the destruction of both human bodies and non-human nature.¹⁴⁰

If images of the railroad in the West are always in some way traces of Manifest Destiny, then Russell's pictures showcase an aesthetic palette of sublime and picturesque tones that mock the harmonious intertwining of industry and nature, and instead reveal the deeply dissonant clash between physical reality and the hymn of Progress.

Yet, the only reason that Russell could do any of this was because, in the end, he was as adept at marketing himself as he was at mixing chemicals, coating glass plates, securing contracts from military generals as well as captains of industry, and manipulating shadows with his lenses. He was a master of one of the most erudite, stereotypically modern techniques of the nineteenth century, who just so happened to be present at the century's most consequential events, and he negotiated between an all-in worship of technology and an anti-modern, therapeutic rejection of reality in order to forge something unique, something that, even today, bursts its bounds. But we won't see any of this if we focus primarily on his words, which sound, at first, an awful lot like those of any pro-expansionist booster. When he wrote back to his hometown newspaper of the events he witnessed at Promontory Point, he exclaimed: "The long coveted opening to the markets of the East has been has at last been furnished by the genius, enterprise, and public spirit of the United States." There's the capitalistic drive, the American exceptionalism that seems so painfully transparent. And he adds to it a head-shaking belief in Manifest Destiny, that God himself intended the American West for U.S. settlement: "since the settlement of [Utah] rain has increased in proportion to the growth of the country and the spread of agriculture."¹⁴¹ Rain will follow the plow, he says. For most, this is enough to dismiss Russell as just another agent of American empire.

But it is, I think, significant that Russell's verbal reportage is boilerplate: "The continental iron band now permanently unites the distant portions of the Republic."¹⁴² That word, "unites," carried many overtones in 1869, a scant four years after Lee surrendered at Appomattox. Americans North and South were tired of war, tired of surveying the wrecked town, landscapes, and bodies that survived, tired of death. Thousands of glass-plate negatives taken by Matthew Brady famously languished—few wanted to see what they offered, anymore, but Russell was a born photographer, a born image-maker, someone for whom words paled beside the power of a picture. He had no choice but to look. And so I don't see anything odd about the tension between Russell's prose and his art: his writing was a desperate attempt to remake what he himself knows is impossible, to reimagine what has already been inscribed on collodion, to change the past and the present. With photography, though, there are no second chances, just preserved decisive moments. Russell knew this. He had witnessed the horrors of the Civil War, in which well over half a million people lost their lives, death on a hitherto unimaginable scale, horrors which fundamentally altered not just the political bonds of the nation, but the entire culture of living and the work of dying, as well; he had seen whole landscapes—people, buildings, earth, horses—pulverized. For many, the post-Civil War years saw doubt replacing optimism: how could anyone whole-heartedly believe in the exceptionalism of human nature, the sanctity and godliness of life creatures, after witnessing four long years of reckless murder?¹⁴³ Russell had been an integral part of a war strategy that relied heavily on railroads, on capturing them, destroying them, protecting them, rebuilding them. It was a strategy of dispersal that spread the effects of the war up and down the line, leaving thousands uprooted, wandering, looking for a new place to settle, a multitude for whom the post-war West seemed to be providential indeed, and pure, untainted by fraternal warfare.¹⁴⁴ For many, the West became a

salve bound against the nation's wound by the railroad's unbreakable iron bands, a place above human strife where one could beat one's sword into a ploughshare and through hard work, find success, find the American Dream.¹⁴⁵ And so I hear a desperate note in Russell's all-too-chipper letter home—a letter that would have been read by veterans, and the parents, friends and acquaintances of those who would never make it back to Nunda—an overly cheerful insistence that the continent was now permanently united, that the sacrifices had to have been worth it, and that technology was inevitably healing the nation. He needed to believe that there was hope in the western landscape, and his hope takes a generic—though not disingenuous—written form. But he couldn't buck his muse, and so he turned a skeptical, monocular camera's eye upon the most modern aspect of Manifest Destiny.

This is why we should pay attention to Russell's photographs: he gives us an environmental visual aesthetic of ambivalence, and ultimately humility. It's different from the standard Ansel Adams vision of a grand humanless, nationalist nature which graces so many environmentally oriented magazines and websites. It's also different from the tradition of environmental documentary photography: the exploding oil rigs or pesticide plants, the eroded farm fields or refuse-choked waterways in which humans are only ever either victims or destroyers. These are the mainstream environmental visual aesthetics that we have in the contemporary West, and it's hard to overstate their cultural and political importance. I wouldn't want to live in a world without them. Yet, in a way, they're both too easy: they don't ask much of us other than to be either dazzled or horrified, and to send a check to the proper organization.¹⁴⁶ I do think that part of the reason Russell hasn't been taken seriously as a cultural critic is that he fits neither aesthetic, and only recently, in the emergence of a school known as New Topographics, have landscape photographs been made that resonate with Russell's work.¹⁴⁷

Russell's photos aren't of inviolate wildernesses to be worshipped reverentially; instead, his nature is sublimely aloof, unknowable, uncomfortable. His humans aren't brutish destroyers, either, or martyrs, but tend to be alienated, vulnerable, and alone, Promethean victims of their own hubris. His technology is devious, offspring of an irrational drive to bend nature to the human will.

His photographs make me nervous in their refusal to give up their meaning. They raise questions, but rarely pose answers, rarely give a sense for how we, abandoned at Calvary, should proceed: this ambiguity is haunting, and infectious, compelling us to look. And this may be their ultimate power, what has kept me coming back. Though his camera often spoke to him—"the truthful camera tells the tale, and tells it well"—Russell, the visual artist, never really tells us what he heard.¹⁴⁸

Yet, hearing, of course, isn't the point. Russell, originally hired merely as a photographer to document the role modern technology and engineering played in winning the Civil War, could not look away. His photos have preserved a moment of time, forever, preserved a space, forever, long after the death of their maker. If nothing else Russell's photos are deeply moving and I can testify that the act of living with them brings revelation after revelation, a rebirth through looking. My interpretations might be all wrong, the previous pages grievously mistaken, but of this I'm certain: he asks us, too, not to look away, not to pass glibly along, pretending that the annihilation of space and time have been an unchecked convenience. There's implied critique in this position, surely, but there is also hope, for he asks us to dwell, to linger for a moment with our eyes, to pay attention to *our* world. In the end, he asks us to ponder for ourselves the untold beauties—even amongst tragedy—his camera caught.

That is enough if one wants to question the equation of Progress with technological advance, geographical empire, and runaway profit.

9.

Of course, Russell was far from the only photographer whose eye lingered over the 1000 Mile Tree, his image only one of dozens that were in circulation, few of which shared Russell's ambivalence. Indeed, the early travel guides describe the area around the 1000 Mile Tree in generally romantic prose that reimagines the train as quite naturally part of the landscape. *Nelsons' Pictorial Guidebook* (c. 1870), despite the Tree's relatively modest girth and height, roots it in a deep American past which had always anticipated the Golden Spike: "the *One Thousand Mile Tree*... marks the exact distance from Omaha, and for centuries has marked it, before Watt had perfected the steam-engine, or George Stephenson the locomotive."¹⁴⁹ Like the Barkalorv Brothers's guidebook from 1886, *Album of the Union Pacific Railway*, *Nelson's Pictorial Guidebook* features a lithograph of the 1000 Mile Tree that looks totally unlike Russell's photograph. In both, the railroad seems as if it had always been there, as native to the spot as the surrounding hills: there is no rubble, no signs of construction, no people. The tree itself is wispy, and the telegraph poles sprouting up next to it look as if they sprouted from the tree's pinecones, rather than like a crucifix. And in both, the locomotive is figured prominently.¹⁵⁰

By the end of the nineteenth century, photographers could even begin to make images self-consciously alluding to the Tree's star status, as in Charles Weitfle's image of the tree, which prominently features his photographic tent at the tree's base.



Figure 59: Charles Weitfle. “No. 420 The 1,000-Mile Tree, Weber Canon,” c. 1870. Courtesy AAS.¹⁵¹

Though the tree itself looks worse for the wear—its foliage thinning and dead branches reaching higher up the trunk—vegetation has started to reclaim the spot where Russell’s pile of rubble stood, and it feels to me like there’s less of a distinct contrast between nature and industry; instead, Weitfle has captured a must-see stop on a transcontinental tour, and image that’s neither celebratory nor critical. It’s nice in that bland way that tourist souvenirs often are.

William H. Jackson’s *1000 Mile Tree—Weber Canon*—is anything but ordinary or bland: even despite the poor printing, when one looks at it through a stereoscope, one feels a flurry of activity, a documentary moment in which Jackson captured the actual workers themselves. It’s posed, of course, but doesn’t feel like it, with workers bending their backs, straightening the rails, adjust the sleepers in their gravel bed, the real-life men who built the railroad that John

Carbutt's Samuel Reed took credit for, an image democratizing the feat that was the transcontinental railroad.



Figure 60: W.H. Jackson. “1000 Mile Tree—Weber Canon,” 1869. Courtesy AAS.¹⁵²

Others, like Carleton Watkins's, erase the railroad entirely in an act of what could either be interpreted as critique—the photographers attempt to picture the world he would like to live in—or a picturesque greenwashing that hides the corporate scar cut into the landscape.



Figure 61: Carleton Watkins, “1,000 Mile Tree, Weber Canyon,” c. 1870. Courtesy AAS¹⁵³

Yet, in all the images of the 1000 Mile Tree that I’ve had the great pleasure to gaze at, Russell’s ambivalence, talent, and sheer mystery are only matched by one other photographer, a possibly brain-damaged Englishman—a year away from murdering his wife’s lover—a man who changed his first name from Edward to Eadweard, and whose family name slowly developed from Muggeridge, to Muygridge, Maybridge, and, finally, Muybridge, a man who claimed credit as the “photographic artist” $\text{H}\epsilon\lambda\iota\sigma$ S, the Greek sun god, who paused beneath the 1000 Mile Tree and made a remarkable stereographic triptych.¹⁵⁴ He was the inventor of an improved washing machine, an innovative method of printing, the skyshade—which allowed one to create photographs in which landscape and sky were both perfectly developed—and eventually the stop-motion photography which allowed horses to be caught in mid-stride and hastened the development of motion pictures.¹⁵⁵ In the same year that he captured the 1000 Mile Tree on film,

he won the Medal of Progress for a series of Yosemite photos exhibited at the Vienna Exhibition—he was one of the most well-known photographers of his time—and when he was in the famous California valley, he spent a great deal of time making studies of trees, focusing on suggestive, picturesque arboreal poses.¹⁵⁶

In 1873, as Muybridge stood beneath the 1000 Mile Tree, he had already begun photographing Occident, Leland Stanford's trotter, eventually culminating in the famous photograph of the horse with all four hooves off of the ground, a photograph which settled an ages-old artistic debate. These photographs would, in turn, lead Muybridge to his remarkable motion studies in which animals, athletes, women, children, and people with disabilities were sequentially photographed against a grid as they leapt, wrestled, swept, crawled, or limped before Muybridge's lens. These photos have rightfully caused an almost endless debate amongst critics—are they exploitation, or art? Do they objectify or dignify?—but they have also unfairly eclipsed Muybridge's earlier work.¹⁵⁷

In 1873, the motion studies were still half-a-decade away. And so when Muybridge looked through his camera's lens he didn't see a single frozen frame of a liquid movement, but a deeply dramatic narrative. If all photographs hover in tension somewhere between objective documentary and artistic representation, Muybridge's photos of the 1000 Mile Tree tilt strongly toward the theatrical: they're one act plays rendered in collodion and albumen.

What he gave us that day is a series that is at first puzzling, and upon further inspection, unsettling.¹⁵⁸ Take out your stereoscope, put its velvet-trimmed tin viewer up to your eyes, slide *Thousand Mile Tree, 1000 Miles West of Omaha* into the holder, adjust the wooden frame, and wait a few seconds as your eyes make the physical, muscular adjustment that's necessary to merge the two images into one hyperreal view.



Figure 62: Muybridge, *1,000 Mile Tree, 1000 Miles West of Omaha*, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

At first glance this looks entirely conventional, like something out of Watkins's or Weitfle's canon. But stay with the image a little longer, look at the tree, at its base, at the tomahawk leaning against its trunk.

After a while, gingerly slide the old one back into its protective case; switch to the next image in the series.



Figure 63: Muybridge, *Thousand Mile Tree, 1000 Miles West of Omaha, Looking West*. New York Public Library.¹⁵⁹

The title, *Thousand Mile Tree, 1000 Miles West of Omaha, Looking West*, glanced over quickly, orients us. We're facing the same way that we were in Russell's photo, west, but unlike Russell's it's almost uninhabited, except for the character who, squinting just barely reveals, is dressed in a long duster and a very wide-brimmed cowboy's hat. To twenty-first century eyes it looks like a scene from a Western, the lone man confidently striding toward the lens. These photos are

stories. And if Muybridge had only given us these two, they could be a narrative of conquest, of an absent Indian presence metonymically signaled by that tomahawk succeeded by the view of the western pioneer, hardy and upright, emerging out of the distance to stake his claim.¹⁶⁰ But Muybridge made a third view, and *Thousand Mile Tree, 1000 Miles West of Omaha, Looking East* is a strange one. Slide it into the stereoscope and see for yourself.



Figure 64: Muybridge, *Thousand Mile Tree, 1000 Miles West of Omaha, Looking East*, New York Public Library.¹⁶¹

Again, we're looking east, but at what? The railroad is clearly meant to be a part of the scene, and three telegraph poles totter drunkenly, that much is clear. There's a figure just off center but it's hard to tell who or what he or she is. The person has a stout walking staff and a bundle, but everything else is obscured. What is this?

It's tempting to just flip this stereograph out of the viewer and continue on the stereographic tour, on to Pulpit Rock and Beacon Rock, because it's not a self-contained image, its ambiguity is open-ended and gestures beyond the stereoscope's frame to a cultural referent, a

visual rhyme, no longer in use, but would have been nevertheless familiar to nineteenth-century cognoscenti. Here's the image Muybridge's *Thousand Mile Tree, 1000 Miles West of Omaha, Looking East* plays on:



Figure 65: Gustave Doré, from *The Legend of the Wandering Jew: A Series of Twelve Designs*, 1873. Courtesy AAS.¹⁶²

Look at the topography, and how each image seems to be set in the same pass. In both scenes we have crosses jammed into the dirt amidst trees, and a lone character struggling in the foreground. The resonances are striking, even if the meaning is at first not clear: why has Muybridge photographed the Wandering Jew?¹⁶³

It's a Christian legend that starts to come into a recognizable shape in seventeenth-century Germany, and tends to run like this: on his way to Calvary, dragging his cross upon his shoulder, Jesus paused to rest for a moment at the doorstep of a man—some versions make him a

shoemaker, some Pilate's doorkeeper. Sometimes the man cuffs Christ, and sometimes he simply drives him away verbally, but the result is inevitably that Jesus, rather than meekly turning the other cheek, replies something like, "I go, but you will walk until I come again."¹⁶⁴ The man has been known by various names in various traditions, but two tend to stand out: Ahasuerus (or Ahasver) and Salathiel. Initially, the myth was intended to legitimize Christian anti-Semitic aggression: not only did the Jews supposedly kill Christ, but they mocked him, they reveled in the spectacle of his humiliation, and Jesus's command that they wander the earth until the Second Coming meant that Jewish oppression and dispersion at Christian hands was divine will. Though the exclusionary aspect of the tale was never fully exorcised, its meaning changed over the course of two centuries, from the Wandering Jew as despised outsider to sympathetic sufferer, agent of God, even freedom fighter.¹⁶⁵

One of the things that is outstanding in the legend is that the Wandering Jew saunters from country to country, witnesses wars and shipwrecks, the rise and fall of empires, gaining wisdom along the way. He's a deeply rooted, almost sublime witness to world history, and as it turns out, one of the Wandering Jew's favorite stomping grounds was the U.S.: the myth took root in American soil with a tenacity unmatched by any other country, especially during the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, just a few months before the Golden Spike was driven into Utah soil, "this very notorious and venerable" Wandering Jew was seen, literally seen, sauntering through central New York State. He appeared, reported the *Salt Lake Deseret News*, at the village of Hart's Corners on the second of September, a "venerable looking individual with a large hooked nose, larger ears, and finger nails about an inch long"—always, the anti-Semitic stereotype. When questioned, the man gave an account of his pedestrian tour from "Siberia to America *via* Behrings straits, through the wilds of Alaska."¹⁶⁷ This was a well-worn trope, in

which the American version of the Wandering Jew is a Daniel Boone figure who continually drifts beyond the pale of human civilization, witness to an incomprehensibly long life, the sublime of old age, a sort of human Sequoia, but tragically so, doomed for his crimes to never find peace until the end times.

But something funny happened to the Wandering Jew during his long travels: “The world has witnessed the strange spectacle of a people scattered amongst the nations of the world,” writes Doré, “yet preserving its character, and its religion, in spite of continual persecutions to which it has been subjected.”¹⁶⁸ The character once reviled as a criminal has become, by the nineteenth century, a victim himself, a heroic victim who preserves his culture in the face of modernity. And wherever he pops up, he’s a reminder of atrocity. This understanding, the Wandering Jew as the shade of past injustices that refused to stay dead and buried, crops up throughout the U.S., including the Finger Lakes of central New York, whose Seneca Lake was haunted by the Wandering Jew’s naturalized counterpart: an uprooted tree, “its roots and branches blackened with age and broken and worn by the waves which had washed it for generations,” a sort of peripatetic tombstone commemorating a murder committed in the earliest days of European settlement.¹⁶⁹ This, I think, is what Muybridge was counting on his audience to recognize: the unnaturalness of violence.¹⁷⁰

There’s yet another possible layer to this photograph, one that has to do with Muybridge himself, a photographer who worked for the railroads, a man standing at the very hinge of American modernity.¹⁷¹ ΗελιοS was certainly a man who understood hubris: he named his business the “Flying Studio,” an association with speed and technology that outran even the fastest locomotive, and he invented a trademark that drove home the association of his art with everything miraculously modern.



Figure 66: Muybridge, Flying Studio Trademark.¹⁷²

Prometheus, the bringer of light. But for the man who looked towards the rising sun and saw the Wandering Jew coming west along the railroad tracks, I'm inclined to read his brand as somewhat more ambiguous, the monstrous, cyclopean eye unnaturally grafted onto bird's wings as a Frankensteinian mechanical contraption flying a bit too close to the sun, an Icarian boast as well as a chastened acknowledgement that the glue could come unstuck from feathers at any moment. Muybridge as Icarus, as prideful sinner? Maybe Muybridge himself as Wandering Jew, whose punishment for the offense of playing a role in the annihilation of space and time was to be condemned to freeze it, to wander the earth witnessing, graving images? It's not too much of a stretch: in 1877 Gaston Tissandier's *History and Handbook of Photography* was published, and in it was an 1859 woodcut of a "Portable Photographic Apparatus," an image Muybridge, a passionate consumer of the newest photographic gadgetry, might have known:



Figure 67: Tissandier, *Portable Photographic Apparatus*, 1878.¹⁷³

10.

And what of the Tree itself? Thomas Stevens, pedaling his newfangled bicycle through the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains, rode beneath its overhanging branches in 1885. “This tree is having a tough struggle for its life these days,” he wrote. “It looks sick and dejected; and one side of its honored trunk is smitten as with leprosy. The fate of the Thousand-Mile Tree is sealed. It is unfortunate in being the most conspicuous target on the line for the fe-ro-ci-ous youth who comes West with a revolver in his pocket and shoots at things from the car-window. Judging from the amount of cold lead contained in that side of its venerable”—again, that word—“trunk next to the railway few of these thoughtless marksmen go past without honoring it with a shot.”¹⁷⁴ The overexcited, gun-toting passengers, eager to live out their fantasies of

Buffalo Bill's Wild West shoot-'em-ups, had been blazing away at the Tree for a few years by the time Stevens got there, and had even destroyed a funereal plate that a grieving husband had attached to it in 1881 to commemorate his wife. She had passed away just as their train chuffed past the rooted, living memorial.¹⁷⁵ Then, in June of 1898, Canadian railway photographer H.C. Barley took what I think is the Tree's death portrait. Its scourged bark has peeled off in sheets, and it looks like it has been burned; perhaps a stray spark from a passing locomotive landed on a pocket of resin, turning the 1000 Mile Tree, for just a few minutes, into a burning bush.¹⁷⁶



Figure 68: H.C. Barley, *1000 Mile Tree*, Yukon Archives, H.C. Barley Fonds #265.¹⁷⁷

PART FOUR

Possession: Sequoyah, Karl Marx, and General Sherman.

Indigo was shocked at the sight: wrapped in canvas and big chains on the flat wagon was a great tree lying helpless, its leaves shocked limp, followed by its companion; the stain of damp earth like dark blood seeped through the canvas. As the procession inched past, Indigo heard low creaks and groans—not sounds of the wagons but from the trees. The Scottish gardener and Susan followed along behind the wagons in a buggy.

-Leslie Marmon Silko, 1999.¹

1.

A cold breath sweeping down from the rocky peaks to the east brushes through tree tops hundreds of feet above the ground, so high that the only sound making it down to the roots is a soft shushing. Surrounded by a rainbow of trees—pines gray and yellow, mottled blacks and blues of oaks, luminous white firs—the giant cinnamon-red-colored trunk, dozens of feet in circumference, ascends far overhead before branching out into its first limb, a shoot big enough to be a goodly-sized tree itself, an arm extended from bark deeply furrowed by age and exposure, bark so deep that you could sink your hand into it, a thick skin protecting the soft inner wood pulsing blood-red and soft pink from fire. You can lie on the ground, and if the breeze above pushes hard enough, feel the earth rock with the tree slowly back-and-forth swaying, hush-a-bye—whispers: words just beyond comprehension.

California's Mt. Whitney, standing at 14,491 feet, is the tallest thing in the contiguous United States, and as the climbing eastern sun hits its flanks, the mountain casts a long shadow due west, a finger of dawn alighting on Whitney's complement, the giant sequoia known as General Sherman—the biggest tree in the world.² This is a landscape of superlatives, which annoyed Thoreau, who preferred to see the exceptional in the pedestrian: "Many a weed here stands for more of life to me than the big trees of California would if I should go there," he wrote in 1857.³ I think he may have been still smoldering over the Mexican American War, the one that brought California into the Union and the enforcement of slavery into the North, and so perhaps, even if he had the chance, he would have refused to stroll through sequoian groves. Or maybe the temptation would have proved irresistible. In either case, Thoreau never made it

further west than Minnesota, though A.J. Russell cast his deep-focus eye over the scenery, as did Muybridge.

It doesn't hurt to daydream: perhaps fantasy is the genre best suited to a landscape in which Lilliputian humans cast their faces sunward—strange, unique leaves—straining for a glimpse of the invisible. Indeed, ever since America began fantasizing of its place in a continental empire, California has seemed both a promise and an answer. Travel writer Albert D. Richardson wrote, eyes aglow, of his mid-century rambles throughout the U.S., “In exhaustlessness and variety of resources, no other country on the globe equals ours.... Its mines, forest and prairies await the capitalist. Its dusky races, earth-monuments and ancient cities importune the antiquarian. Its cataracts, canyons and crests woo the painter. Its mountains, mineral and stupendous vegetable productions challenge the naturalist.”⁴ Though Richardson was writing about the entire trans-Mississippi West, he might as well have been penning a love letter to the synecdochic Golden State: the frontispiece to his *Beyond the Mississippi* (1867) is a dreamscape of fantastic proportions, and the entire lower half of the image is meant to suggest the Yosemite Valley with its towering El Capitan off on the left facing the famous Bridalveil Falls. Occupying center stage of the fantastic four-ring circus is an image of an entirely imagined train, the headlight of Progress scattering wild Indians and wild animals as the famous features of Yosemite look on.



Figure 69: Albert D. Richardson's *Beyond the Mississippi*, 1867.

To the left and right of the main attraction, farmers reap their rich rewards, while miners chip away at a hillside. Gold and silver, territory, forests, coastline, markets, land for social experimentation, deserts blooming like a rose: California had it all. From the perspective of the starry-eyed congregants gathered around pianos in parlors throughout the country, hard work and divine destiny converged in the Golden State: “the original Garden of Eden,” as one writer put it in 1864.⁵ And so with voices tinged alternately by longing and conviction, dreaming their troubles all away, they belted out:

‘Tis not chance that guides our footsteps,
Or our destiny can seal
With a will then strong and steady,
Put your shoulder to the wheel.
With a will then strong and steady,
Put your shoulder to the wheel.⁶

Californian fantasies come easily, and dreaming is full of countermodern potential. What is a dream but the feeling of the past or the future, some alternate reality intruding upon the present? Questions can arise, such as: how long have these trees been here? How many winters did it take to form those glaciers? Are there abandoned gold mines around here? Did Indians live here? Is that the view John Muir describes in *My First Summer in the Sierra*? Will all of this still be here a few generations from now, and what will it look like? Questions like these unhinge time, make it fold back on itself. The arrow-straight linearity, the eminently modern, rational time line of one-thing-follows-the-next buckles under the weight of the forward-backward-looking lived present. In groping for answers we position ourselves close to the imagined, we understand some sort of connection, some link, tenuous though it may be, that defies chronology. We speak across a distance at once great and near. Time seems less a line and more a curving path, looping and twisting back upon itself. In a pedantic sense, no that view is not the one John Muir saw: a billion raindrops have weathered the features, one hundred and fifty winters have shifted the talus slopes, fifty thousand days of sun have shone down upon the land, bleaching the rocks and baking motes of dust forever on the move. Everything about the physical landscape has changed, if ever so slightly. But that stance satisfies no one other than the unoriginal and the doctrinaire. In a larger, more poetic sense, we might say yes, the view is the same—or at least it rhymes. It is in these rhymed passages that the past and the future come close, become familiars, like near-contemporaries just out of focus. Ghostly, dreamlike possibility rushes in, but the ghosts of past and present are not silent, nor undemanding. They inevitably pose questions, sometimes questions of responsibility, questions of justice, the sorts of questions that crop up when we consider who we have been and where we are going.⁷

There's fine light in these sequoian woods clinging to the sides of the Sierras—clear, intense—light to go prospecting by, auguring well for discovery. And certainly the hope of finding a fortune, of striking the main chance, has underwritten quite a bit of California history. But wealth has never been the only, nor even the most important of California dreams, and there has existed alongside the utopian capitalist fantasy of limitless profit another tradition, one that has seen in California the promise of Edenic environmental harmony and social justice, a tradition that has asked of itself how to live justly and responsibly. Yet I must admit that the sentence I just inked leaves me feeling a little guilty: though not intentionally, it misleads, it is awfully simplified, implies that there are two different and opposing paths that diverge in the Golden Hills, one evil and concerned only with money, another spotless and altruistically humanitarian. Of course, the world is not that simple, and neither are our histories. Neither are our landscapes. I've walked from Yosemite south through Sequoia National Park to sit on the summit of the United States and watch the sun rise: it is a beautiful landscape, all of it, empty and peacefully quiet. Yet every one of those miles I tromped was through land that was once someone's home. Now, Sequoia National Park, all 864,000 acres of it, belongs to the American public, who are no longer invited to live within its boundaries. The silence that I thrilled to is the sound made by a landscape of violence, born of a rifle shot. Peaceful and silent, violent and deserted, the sequoias testify to something more hopeful than a crime, more sobering than America's best idea.

2.

George Gale should have a sequoia named for him, lest we ever forget.

California became world famous in 1848 for the discovery of gold near Sutter's Mills, and shortly thereafter fame of another sort followed. In 1852 word began to spread from Calaveras County, just south of the Rush's epicenter, of trees so immensely large that even those familiar with the coast redwoods—trees capable of growing more than 300 feet in a span of 1500 years—stood stunned in their shade.⁸ The western world had known of the redwoods since the late 18th-century, and its first detailed description appeared in print in 1776 by Spanish missionary Fray Pedro Font.⁹ But it wasn't until Augustus T. Dowd, gun slung over his shoulder, strode back to camp with tales of a giant grizzly, one bigger than anyone had ever seen, that the West began to learn of the Big Trees.¹⁰ Dowd was a hunter who supplied meat to the workers busily engaged digging the life-blood canals for John C. Frémont's Mariposa gold-mining operation, and on that day in 1852, so the story goes, Dowd had been tracking a wounded grizzly when he stumbled into the Calaveras Grove of giant sequoias. Nose to the trail, he "suddenly came upon one of those immense trees that have since become so justly celebrated throughout the civilized world," wrote one of the Sierra's first boosters, former miner J.M. Hutchings.¹¹ "All thoughts of hunting were absorbed and lost in the wonder and surprise inspired by the scene. 'Surely,' he mused, 'this must be some curiously delusive dream!'"¹²

There had been previous tales of the mammoth things—dismissed as rumor, merely—but when Dowd led his incredulous friends to see his prize, the world suddenly craned its incredulous eye skyward, if only for a moment.¹³ For Dowd's tree, the Discovery Tree, was promptly cut down, the prostrate trunk fashioned into a bowling alley, the stump a dance floor capable of accommodating thirty waltzing couples. "However incredible it may appear," wrote Hutchings, who loved to kick up his heels, "on July 4, 1854, the writer formed one of a cotillion party of thirty-two persons, dancing upon this stump; in addition to which musicians and

lookers-on numbered seventeen, making a total of forty-nine occupants of its surface at one time!”¹⁴

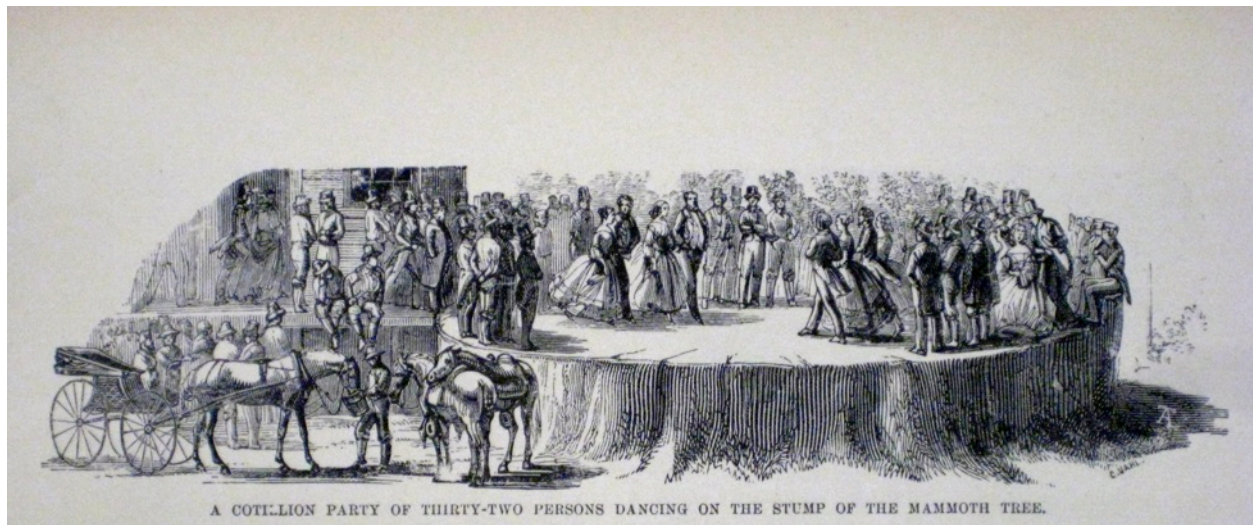


Figure 70: “A Cotillion Part of Thirty-Two Persons Dancing on the Stump of the Mammoth Tree,” 1871. Courtesy, Cornell University.¹⁵

And George Gale, always on the lookout for a quick dollar, an Argonaut frustrated by his inability to get rich enough quickly enough with pick and shovel, saw opportunity. Into the Calaveras Grove of Big Trees he went, looking for the biggest trophy he could find, until his roving eye settled on the Mother of the Forest. Industriosly, methodically slicing deeply into her bark, he skinned it slowly back eight-foot section at a time to expose her soft inner wood, finally stripping her to the height of 116 feet until she stood rose-red and gleaming wet, utterly destroyed, withering and finally dying two years later. His work done, he sent his trophy East, to the Crystal Palace in New York City, site of the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations—the World’s Fair of 1853—presided over by the Prince of Humbug himself, Phineas T. Barnum.¹⁶

Thus the giant sequoia made its debut into American culture, prompting a disgusted Thoreau to write, “the trees were so large and venerable that they could not afford to let them

grow a hair's breadth bigger, or live a moment longer to reproach themselves.... it was not for the sake of the wood; it was only because they were very grand and venerable.”¹⁷

It's an accident, then, that the giant sequoia entered American history through its coincidental association with gold, a sideshow of easy profit's compulsion. That association is a big part of the reason that it took so long for Americans to stumble upon them in the first place: the Sierras are rugged, and the winters are famous for dropping wet loads of snow ten, twelve, or more feet deep—Sierra cement skiers today call it. Unlike the redwoods, the sequoias stand aloof in inaccessible places, scattered widely along an extremely limited range from Placer County, near Reno, south to present day Sequoia National Park—a distance of only 260 or so miles, rooted in a narrow band between 5000 and 8000 feet of altitude that is nowhere more than 15 miles wide. Finally, these shy trees don't strike out singly but huddle amongst their own: single, isolated trees are rare, and depending on how one defines a grove, there are only 65-75 currently existing groups. They huddle together for protection and company: they are social beings. Finally, because Spanish and then Mexican settlement tended to take advantage of the agricultural and forest lands along the coast, there was little incentive to wander inland to the inhospitable peaks of the Sierra, and so it makes sense that the Big Trees remained hidden from Western eyes until the feverish pursuit of gold attracted Americans to California's most rugged areas, flushing the sylvan beauties from their cover. Gold and sequoia: the two are intertwined, differing faces of an emerging modern America.

3.

Much of what was considered most modern was collected and breathlessly shown off at the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations. Attracted by the promises of Progress, and looking

for a boost up the social ladder, a young New Englander named Galen Clark found himself strolling through the Exhibition grounds. Though he just missed seeing the Mother of the Forest's flayed hide, he witnessed enough Californian gold dust on display to whet his appetite for wanderlust. Soon after, Clark made his way to the Sierras, where, like A.T. Dowd before him, the magnetism of Frémont's huge Mariposa pulled him in. Initially a Spanish land grant idyllically named for butterflies, Frémont presciently snatched Las Mariposas up just as gold was discovered at the end of the Mexican American war. The Pathfinder's property became the "jumping off place of civilization" for tourists interested in seeing Yosemite Valley or the Big Trees; but one also gets the sense that Mariposa was one of those places where the proscenium of Progress was breeched to reveal the chugging machinery sustaining, staining, the illusion.¹⁸

When pastor Thomas Starr King visited Mariposa on his way to the Big Trees in the winter of 1860-1861, he could not quite mold the right words to cast Frémont's operation in a properly triumphalist tone: "The glistening rock from the four levels of the Josephine vein, and the five galleries of the noble Pine Tree mine below, is not hauled plodding by oxen to be disenchanted of its wealth, but hurries to the river down a grade of one foot in seven by its own gravity, and pours into the mills faster than they can pound it into paste." A Bostonian transplant come to bring Unitarianism to California, he was also an avid mountaineer, and his *The White Hills: Their Legends, Landscape and Poetry* (1859) was a well known account of his rambles in New Hampshire's White Mountains. He was also fond of Thoreau—" 'I admire you your approaching rapture,'" he once wrote to a friend about to begin *Walden*, and was apparently likewise enraptured by Mariposa.¹⁹ Yet, it is as if his words themselves exerted an agency of their own, refused to simply trumpet. And so King stands enthralled as Josephine's vein bleeds into the river, as Pine Tree is hollowed out from within, as rocks are pounded into paste. Both

Josephine and Pine Tree were located in a hill called Mt. Bullion, and King observes, without a trace of irony, that, “with capital enough to handle Mt. Bullion properly, and make it bleed at every vein, the Frémont estate would yield millions a year.”²⁰ Mariposa’s wings eventually stretched over a seventy square-mile property which sat right in the middle of the mother lode, and came to include six mines, two towns, a railroad, and a rent-paying population of over seven thousand souls, one of whom, miner and surveyor, Galen Clark, I get the feeling, wasn’t enjoying his new job too keenly.²¹

It was an auspicious moment to be dissatisfied: in 1851 Major James D. Savage and his Mariposa battalion had just finished their job of ensuring that nothing human stood between the golden nugget and capitalism’s invisible grasping hand, making California safer for commerce. As 49ers flooded into the Yosemite area, they found that the land of course was already home to many Native peoples, whom we now all lump together under the general classification, “Interior Miwok.”²² In an act of typological irony, the miners disdainfully called the Indians they found “Diggers”—a racially-charged swipe at the Indians’ practices of gathering roots for sustenance—but the Diggers called themselves the Pohoneechees, Potoencies, Wiltucumnees, Nootchoos, Chowchillas, Hownaches, Mewoos, Chookchances, and Ahwahneechees.²³ It was this last group that has become most associated with Yosemite Valley. Clark tells us in his short reminiscence from 1904, *Indians of the Yosemite Valley and Vicinity*, that by the time the 49ers arrived, the Ahwahneechees had already been decimated by three centuries of disease and war wrought by the geopolitically destabilizing entrance of first Spanish, then Mexican, and finally American imperialists.²⁴ But it wasn’t until the late 1840s and early 1850s—when miners began swarming over Indian lands, destroying the oak trees whose acorns were a staple of the Ahwahneechee diet, killing off the game, forcing the Indians into the mines, and, for those miners hailing from

the American South, turning them into slaves—that the Sierra Indians felt themselves at a point of crisis.²⁵ The Gold Rush turned out to be a turning point for California’s Indian populations whose numbers plummeted precipitously—by around 80%—as a direct result of the race for riches and the extension of capitalist markets.²⁶ When the Ahwahneechee and other nearby groups started to resist the miners’ depredations, the US government began a policy of forced relocation—or death. In a story whose cadences are depressingly, repetitively well-worn, the Ahwahneechee fled to the protective fastness of an inhospitable environment (in this case, what we now know as the Yosemite Valley), wild-eyed rumors started circulating of the atrocities committed by these off-the-reservation Indians, and before long the newly formed Mariposa battalion’s bugle echoed from the hills of the Sierras. “Active preparations were accordingly made by the State authorities to follow [the Ahwahneechees], and either capture or exterminate all the tribes involved,” Clark tells us.²⁷

Hoisting their well-oiled rifles, Savage’s butterflies mounted their horses and flew to the Ahwahneechees’ valley...whereupon they found themselves dumbstruck. Reading through volunteer Lafayette Houghton Bunnell’s recollection of the Mariposa War and the discovery of Yosemite, it is tempting to lose oneself in the wonder of his landscape description, one that feels eerily familiar today. It’s hard to overstate the sheer power of the Valley, even in this twenty-first century saturated with photos of El Capitan, Half Dome, and Birdalveil Falls. It’s trite, but when Bunnell writes, “none but those who have visited this most wonderful valley, can even imagine the feelings with which I looked upon the view that was there presented...as I looked, a peculiar exalted sensation seemed to fill my whole being, and found my eyes in tears with emotion,” he is trying, and failing, to give voice to an experience that many try, and fail, to voice today.²⁸ I know what he is talking about because I also have found myself similarly dumbstruck by a peculiar

exalted sensation when I looked upon the Valley for the first time. “But don’t be fooled,” whisper the specters of the past and future: Major Savage’s voice, right on cue, interrupts: “ ‘you had better wake up from that dream up there, or you may lose your hair...We had better be moving; some of the murdering devils may be lurking along this trail to pick off stragglers.’ ”²⁹

This is where Bunnell and I part ways: he was not an historian or outdoor enthusiast; he was nothing more than one of a number of hired guns sent to “subdue such Indian tribes as could not be otherwise induced to make treaties,” as the local news accounts of Savage’s expedition make crystal clear.³⁰ “There is a report,” wrote one correspondent, that the soldiers “defeated the Indians, killed three hundred, and [had] taken one hundred and fifty squaws.”³¹

The Mariposa battalion did their job well: they efficiently, bureaucratically *almost* erased the American Indian presence from Yosemite, though various bands of Indians continued to fight incursion into their land, staging raids on mining camps, and, at one point, even burned down a steam saw mill that was denuding the local forests.³² Nevertheless, the soldiers—and especially Bunnell, who was equally handy with pen as with gun—gave us the Yosemite that has become so well known, so well photographed, so obsessively worshipped as one of the crown jewels of the US environmental movement. But Savage’s men did not, could not, erase everything native. Bunnell once again found himself fantasizing beyond the here and now: “I was not the only one in whom religious emotions or thoughts had been aroused by the mysterious power of the surrounding scenery,” he wrote from the field of battle. He and his fellow soldiers were huddled around a campfire after days of hunting Indians and burning out villages, trying to put words to their experiences, trying to give the place a name: “ ‘an American name would be the most appropriate...it would be better to give it an Indian name than to important a strange and inexpressive one, that the name of the tribe who had occupied it, would be more appropriate than

any I had heard suggested.” And so, after considering and rejecting first one name, then another, Bunnell struck gold: “ ‘I then proposed ‘that we give the valley the name Yo-sem-i-ty, as it was suggestive, euphonious, and certainly *American*; that by so doing, the name of the tribe of Indians which we met leaving their homes in this valley, perhaps never to return, would be perpetuated.’”³³

Echoes of the bark-eater Adirondacks: Yosemite, thought Bunnell, meant “grizzly”; he thought it was what the Ahwahneechee called themselves—though it seems more likely that Yosemite, an anglicized bastardization of *johemite*, was a western Miwok term for the Ahwahneechee meaning “some of them are killers.” In any case, it seemed to make a certain sense: Bunnell and the rest of the battalion derogatorily referred to the Ahwahneechees, and Indians in general, as “grizzlies”—fearsome, and fun to kill. Not only did he name the place, then, his attempt at authenticity sought to cleanse it of the violence of imperialism—his story transforms the Mariposa battalion from exterminators to explorers who meet Indians voluntarily giving up their valley, the Yosemite from battleground to Edenic American homeland.

It was in this sanitary, pristine, silent and empty American wilderness that a dissatisfied Galen Clark heard his calling. A shy character, not much given to self-promotion, his two books, *Indians of the Yosemite Valley and Vicinity* (1904) and *The Big Trees of California* (1907) are largely mute as to Clark’s role in Sierra history; but their language—a sympathetic reading of relocated Ahwahneechee longing for their home; a tendency for Romantic language to creep into prose that he struggles to keep scientifically objective—gives him away: Clark was a dreamer. Though he did not know it when he left New Hampshire, Yosemite was Clark’s gold, and he spent all of his spare time exploring. In 1855, a hunter named Hogg had seen a few giant trees while rooting around in the Yosemite area, and when Clark later heard the tales, he set out to

investigate. A year later he stumbled into what became known as the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees, home of one of the most famous sequoias, The Grizzly Giant.³⁴

I am sure that when he stood amongst the Big Trees for the first time, he felt himself buffeted around by various squalling emotions: perhaps a bit of disappointment, certainly disorientation, and most definitely an overpowering affinity. Whatever the tempest of emotions might have been, it did not take him long to bid farewell to Frémont's Pine Tree mine and relocate himself to the Mariposa of the sequoias, opening what became known as Clark's, the first destination for Big Tree tourists. Thomas Starr King described him as a "man living alone in the wilderness," as essentially benignly wild himself; yet another traveler remarked that Clark was "a hermit and a pioneer...who has turned his back on civilization...Long-bearded and sun-browned, he looks like a modernized Wandering Jew, and talks like a professor of belles-lettres and moral philosophy."³⁵ And indeed, Clark-as-wild-man became something of a trope: in one of the most famous images of the Grizzly Giant, Carleton Watkins captures an image of the former miner nestled in the base of the tree, "a fine-looking, stalwart old grizzly-hunter and miner of the '49 days, wears a noble full beard hued like his favorite game," as one California tourist would put it.³⁶



Figure 71: Carleton Watkins, *Base of the Grizzly Giant*, detail. From *The Yosemite Book*, 1868. Courtesy, AAS.

In fact, Clark and the sequoias of Mariposa became metonyms for one another. Going to the Mariposa Grove inevitably meant spending some time in the presence of the man who, in 1866, was officially appointed the Guardian of the Yosemite Valley and Big Tree Grove.³⁷ Clark's inaugurated a swift tourist business, and became a home to wandering luminaries including Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Muir, and the scientist Asa Grey. Clark, as he often would, played the role of guide to the grove and interpreter of Yosemite lore and history, and until John Muir began publicizing his own exploits in the area, Clark was the person most associated with the Valley and the Big Trees.³⁸ He even presided over a baptism in 1871, allowing Emerson to bestow one of the biggest, grandest as-of-yet unnamed trees in Mariposa with the name Samoset, after a New England American Indian who was reputedly one of the first to greet the Mayflower in 1621.³⁹

Throughout the nineteenth-century, the Calaveras and Mariposa groves of sequoias would remain the most popular tourist destinations for those seeking a glimpse of the Big Trees. They were both near roads that led to other points of interest, and they had significant tourist development: the Calaveras Grove had its downed Discovery Tree, and Mariposa its Grizzly Giant.

But in 1858 yet another miner-cum-provisioner, Hale Tharp was shown a gathering of Big Trees that would eventually be recognized as the most extensive continuous forest containing the largest specimens of sequoias in the Sierras. Tharp was part of the secondary wave of Argonauts who, once the areas around the initial discovery of gold at Sutter's Mills were tapped out, followed the spine of the Sierras south, into an increasingly rugged territory, looking for promising prospect, and in 1856, Tharp settled along the banks of the Kaweah River. Though Tharp is often credited as the first white man to take up permanent residence in the Kaweah area, the landscape had been home to various groups of Monache (Balwisha, Waksachi, Wobunuch), Yokuts (Yaudanchi, Wukchamni, Gaiwa, Yokod), and sometimes Tubatulabal Indians for at least 500 years.⁴⁰ What Tharp found was a landscape teeming with life: "there were about 2,000 Indians then living along the Kaweah River," he recalled in 1910. "Deer were everywhere, with lots of bears along the rivers, and occasionally a grizzly bear. Lions, wolves, and foxes were plentiful. There were a great many ground squirrels, cottontail, and jackrabbits; quail were seen in coveys of thousands.... There were plenty of fish in the rivers."⁴¹ If it looked like Eden it was an Eden assiduously maintained by its native inhabitants who had kept the woodlands open, both by gathering fuel for their fires and by occasionally setting small blazes to control the underbrush. They didn't farm—and so Tharp's eyes would have recognized nothing that looked like settled land—but hunted, fished, and gathered acorns and other nuts, and they migrated

according to season and food supply, thus spreading their impact more or less uniformly over a wide area.⁴² The high mountain passes meant that various bands from the eastern and western sides of the Sierras could trade with each other, and the Kaweah region saw a flourishing network of Indian commerce develop: pine nuts were exchanged for acorns, obsidian for shell-beads, rabbit skins for deer hides.⁴³

But there's something that neither Tharp nor the standard accounts of the sequoia region tell us: this supposed Eden had been the ground-zero for the Tule Indian War of 1856—the very year that Tharp set up camp along the Kaweah River.⁴⁴ Like Yosemite before it, hostilities had erupted after rumors of Indian breakouts, rumors that, even at the time, were shown to be entirely fanciful. Rightfully fearing massacre, various bands of Indians fled for the hills, which only confirmed white suspicions of treachery. Soon enough, a company of volunteers and enlisted men four-hundred strong set out in pursuit of their quarry, dragging behind them a howitzer, and, meeting with fierce resistance, evidently decided that extermination was the only humane course of action. Not a single white person was killed in the decisive battle, though one hundred Indians were, and their physical claim to the landscape was effectively extinguished.⁴⁵

Two years after the army did its duty, Tharp was invited by one of the survivors, an Indian he called Chief Chappo to see the sights, and was led to what we now know as the Giant Forest—so named by John Muir in 1875—home of the largest trees in the world. The Indians in this region were mobile cosmopolites: they had seen, heard, and witnessed firsthand the depredations that followed hard on the heels of the mythical first white man, so when Chappo showed Tharp the Giant Forest, it's a good bet that he was doing so as part of a complex strategy of survival, one which included accommodation, in an effort to stave off violence.⁴⁶

4.

What went through Tharp's mind when he first saw the world's biggest trees? It is hard to know, other than that he wanted the land for himself. And so out with his knife, he blazed his name and date into the bole of a downed giant, making it a witness to his own moment of claim staking.⁴⁷ But I want to believe that he marveled, that making himself a cabin out of the trunk of a prostrate sequoia, literally living inside a tree, was an act partly of poetry. When, a few years later, Muir saw the grove, he wrote in speech characteristically laced with superlatives chosen for their religious shadings: "When I entered this sublime wilderness the day was nearly done, the trees with rosy, glowing countenances seemed to be hushed and thoughtful, as if waiting in conscious religious dependence on the sun, and one naturally walked softly and awe-stricken among them. I wandered on, meeting nobler trees where all were noble, subdued in the general calm, as if in some vast hall pervaded by the deepest sanctities and solemnities that sway human souls."⁴⁸

It's easy, when reading Muir's sacred description of the Big Trees and Tharp's quickness to claim the land, to dismiss the one as a hopeless romantic, and the other as a shameless profiteer. But such is not the case. Muir, for all his overwrought hyperbole—"majestic" is his favorite adjective—actually is fairly representative of a typical reaction to the Big Trees.

This is something that can be hard to see from the academic arm-chair: there is nothing in the world quite like the giant sequoias, and really nothing that can prepare one for the experience. Here's Fitz-Hugh Ludlow, the famous hash eater, whom one might assume was prepared for the fantastic:

Before reaching Clark's we had been astonished at the dimensions of the ordinary pines and firs...But these were in their turn dwarfed by the Big Trees proper, as thoroughly as themselves would have dwarfed a common Green-Mountain forest. I find no one [in the East] who believes the literal truth which travellers tell about

these marvellous giants. People sometime think they do, but that is only because they fail to realize the proposition. They have no concrete idea of how the asserted proportions looks...I freely confess, that though I always thought I *had* believed travellers in their recitals on this subject, when I saw the trees I found I had bargained to credit no such story as that, and for a moment felt half-reproachful towards the friends who has cheated me of my faith under a misapprehension.⁴⁹

Hutchings, like Muir always ready with baroque language, wrote,

Who can picture, in language, or on canvas, all the sublime depths of wonder that flow to the soul in thrilling and intense surprise, when the eye looks upon these great marvels? Long vistas of forest shades, formed by immense trunks of trees, extending hither and thither: now arched by the overhanging branches of the lofty taxodiums, then by the drooping boughs of the white blossomed dogwood; while the high, moaning sweep of the pines, and the low, whispering swell of the firs, sung awe-inspiring anthems to their great Planter.⁵⁰

And the travel writer, Bayard Taylor—the man who could pen things like, “I have a passion for trees, second only to that for beautiful human beings”—found himself stunned: in what is my favorite description of the sequoias, he wrote, “glancing forward, I beheld two great circular—shot towers? Not *trees*, surely!—but yes, by all the Dryads, those are trees!”⁵¹

Muir, Ludlow, Hutching, and Taylor were all seeking to promote the Big Trees for various overlapping reasons—preservation, tourism, fame—and the usual analysis is that these writers “frame the view” for us, that they structure later experiences.⁵² But what usually gets missed is that each writer finds himself groping in the dark for illumination, stretching the boundaries of metaphorical, allusive language to try and convey some sort of authentic experience; and in doing so they wind up missing the trees themselves. The sequoias are like shot-towers, or a vast cathedral’s hall: they’re anything but trees. The only way that Thomas Starr King could begin to make sense of the mammoth things was to transport them away from their native surroundings, to compare them to the biggest things he knew: the Great Elm on Boston’s Common, the Trinity Church in New York, or the monument on Bunker Hill. Any of these beside a giant sequoia would be like “General Tom Thumb at the knee of Hercules,” the

fantastic beside the imaginary.⁵³ It seems that the trees had an almost preternatural power of transmutation: if you had been able to ask a Californian living in the Sierras in the 1850s what a grizzly was, he might respond, a bear, or a tree, or an Indian, or Galen Clark; and when the boundaries between discrete things become as blurry as they do amongst the sequoias, when the only way to describe a thing is through metaphor, a void in meaning inevitably yawns open, an opening for a Dionysian play of images, words, meanings. “The big tree always seems unfamiliar,” wrote Muir: “standing alone, unrelated, with peculiar physiognomy, awfully solemn and earnest.”⁵⁴ I think Ludlow voices perhaps the most poetic description when he writes, “when I saw the trees I found I had bargained to credit no such story.” That was certainly my experience when I first encountered them: the trees are *like* nothing at all, and by the Dryads, there’s no prior experience that could guide one’s perceptions, not even the redwoods. I, like many others, found myself disoriented, adrift. I wouldn’t have credited my own story if I had even been able to write it. Language sometimes simply lapses among the Big Trees.⁵⁵

And as it turns out, so does image making.

Perhaps the most famous image of a sequoia is Watkins’s *The Grizzly Giant, Mariposa Grove*.⁵⁶



Figure 72: Carleton Watkins, *Grizzly Giant, Mariposa Grove*. From *The Yosemite Book*, 1868. Courtesy AAS.

It has been reproduced endlessly at this point, but the oversaturation cannot dilute what is self evidently a photograph literally stretching its own limitations to capture the tree. On first glance, the Grizzly Giant doesn't look *that* big, but the two tiny characters at its base, so small that they almost disappear into the collodion, tell us otherwise. That is wonderful. But stranger yet is the bulge in the tree. Follow it skyward, notice how it seems to warp outwards in the middle of the frame. It's a distortion introduced by the camera's lens: the only way to accurately capture the tree is to bend it enough to fit on film. Then of course there's the glaring tonal contrast: almost too black at the tree's base, and washed out above, the range of light, from deep shadow to brilliant blue sky, too broad for the film's comparatively narrow window of exposure. Due to the

technical limitations of his third, mechanical eye, Watkins even loses some of the definition of the Grizzly Giant's crown, which dissolves into the oblivious horizon.

If Watkins's *The Grizzly Giant, Mariposa Grove* is one of the most famous photographs of a sequoia, then Albert Bierstadt's *The Great Trees, Mariposa Grove* (1876) is certainly one of the more widely circulated paintings—and very clearly based on Watkins's earlier work.⁵⁷

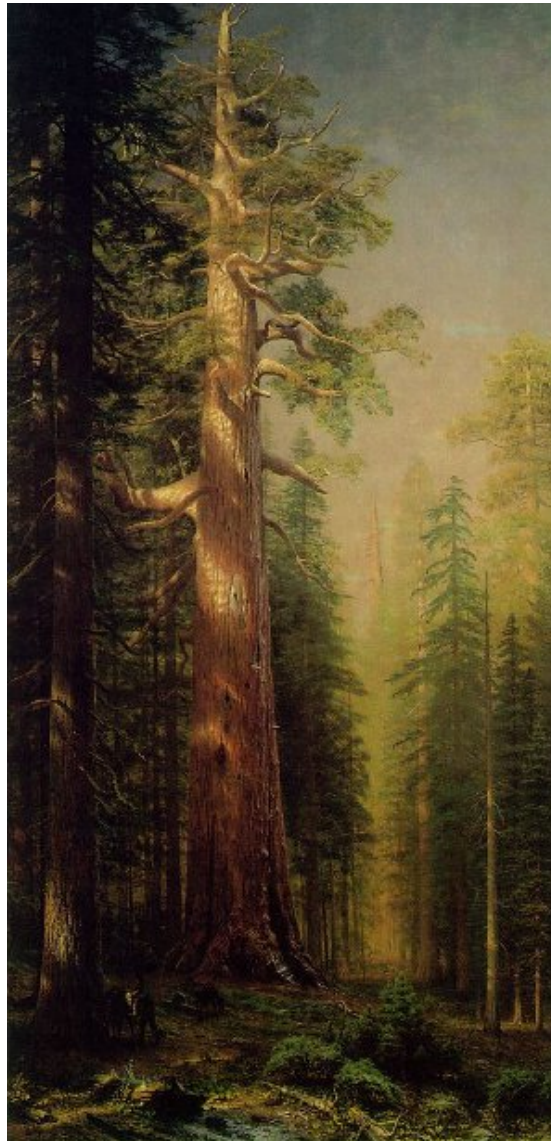


Figure 73: Albert Bierstadt, *The Great Trees, Mariposa Grove*, 1876.

It is also the biggest: at 10'x5', *The Great Trees* mimes the spatial impact of the sequoias. Originally exhibited at the 1876 Centennial International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and products of the Soil and Mine—yet another World's Fair appearance for the sequoia—Bierstadt's painting was exhibited amongst a who's who of famous American artists and their work in a sort of celebratory reckoning of how far a distinctive U.S. visual aesthetic had come since the founding of the Republic.⁵⁸

Yet, what I think is most interesting about this painting is the way that it attempts to make the Big Trees legible, the tropes and codes and visual signposts that guide us towards the hoped for realization that giant sequoias are immensely grand, immensely different from any other tree, immensely full of wonder, immensely American. Many of these visual cues are fairly well-worn: the tiny people in the foreground; the surrounding trees, themselves over-towering the human visitors, that needle upwards; the dramatic lighting. And indeed, *The Great Trees* was skewered by the critical press for being too obvious, even though Bierstadt was given an award of eminence by the centennial commission. Yet I do think that the painting should not be relegated to the dust heap as simply one more nineteenth-century instance of Americanized geographical space, for Bierstadt is also trying to give life to something that was essentially invisible to the unaided human eye.

Instead of the bulging, lens-distorted trunk of *The Grizzly Giant*, we get ruler-straight lines that converge with mathematical precision at the finely illuminated point of the tree's crown. There's a perfect grace, a perfect balance about Bierstadt's tree, and undoubtedly he had heard the stories of how Dowd's sequoia, when it was finally cut through, was so sensitively centered over its trunk, that it refused to fall until many dozens of iron wedges could knock it out of plumb. The sequoia's is a precision that at the same time is usually reserved for the world of

human-made machinery, and yet defies that world. As if to underscore its finely tuned dynamics, Bierstadt includes the great tree's sibling in the background: it is the same shape, and the limbs strike off in a roughly analogous manner, but it leans just ever so slightly to the left. In fact, it seems to be the only tree in the entire composition that varies from the rigidly perpendicular, as if nodding its head to its more poised brother, indicating that yes, there are occasional, anomalous examples of off-centered trees.

Amongst all that's solidly real in *The Great Trees* stalks a specter. Sprouting from the ground just to the right of the Big Tree is the trunk of an invisible giant, its negative space exactly mirroring its twin, its imaginary branches spreading above the height of its neighbors in the same manner as its material twin. Absence is what makes this painting work, makes meaning out of a towering column of wood. By placing the Great Tree in an imagined landscape, by giving it the form of a real sequoia—the Grizzly Giant—by rearranging and simplifying space so that it can be apprehended without distortion, and above all by planting it next to a ghostly other, Bierstadt has managed the trick of creating a sense of uniqueness and wonder even as he implicitly disavows the ability of the actual physical landscape itself to carry coherent meaning. If the painting works, it is because it refuses to stay grounded, because it wanders over a California dreamscape where fantasy gives heft to fact.

In the same way that Muir, Ludlow, Hutching, Taylor, and King found their literary skill inadequate for making sense of the Big Trees, Watkins, Bierstadt, and indeed many others who struggled to visually create meaning from raw sequoia material struggled, trying anything to emphasize their trees' grandeur. G.K. Stillman gave up any pretension of reality for the subscribers to the Cincinnati *Weekly Times*, and instead went in for a sort of postmodern pastiche

by piling many of the Calaveras Grove's most famous trees into one frame, a family collage of notable sequoias shot against a fictional backdrop of a landscape that did not exist.⁵⁹



Figure 74: G.K. Stillman, *The Mammoth Trees of California*, n.d. Courtesy AAS.

Many of these artists and writers were immensely talented, and it is not so much that they were not up to the task, but that the western cultural categories of nature appreciation had been devised in a different landscape, had been tutored by different trees. Writing of the Adirondack wilderness in 1865, one author argued that “our minds are conventionally unfitted, our imaginations too limited, or not sufficiently active, to picture its grandeur and magnificence”—

and that was for an eastern forest of modestly sized trees.⁶⁰ The trembling hand holding on to pen or brush, the tentativeness with which many artists approached the sequoias isn't surprising given the genealogy of landscape aesthetics. William Gilpin, in his eighteenth-century investigations of the picturesque, found himself surveying his native English countryside, trying to develop a theory about why certain landscapes were pleasing, about how one could deliberately create delightful surroundings. He wrote, "It is no exaggerated praise to call a tree the grandest and most beautiful of all the productions of the earth," and, indeed, his *Remarks on Forest Scenery* is at once a field guide, a philosophical argument, a landscape manual, and a love letter to arboreal forms.⁶¹ What he finally settled on, based on his field observations, is that form, lightness, and balance are the crucial elements composing the picturesque, and without all three, a tree may be interesting, or even beautiful, but it can never be picturesque.⁶²

The problem for the sequoias is that such an aesthetic depended on visibility, on trees that grew to be, at most, one hundred or so feet high, not ones that disappeared into the clouds. Gilpin's picturesque evolved in a pastoral English landscape, one that, through centuries of intensive agricultural land use, had been scaled to a human size, and so a landscape in which dwarfed humans crawled along the feet of mountains as huge as the Sierras, or craned expectant faces upwards at sequoia limbs hundreds of feet from the ground...this was not a landscape that existed in any way that would be recognizable to Gilpin or his followers.⁶³



Figure 75: Lithograph from William Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, 1808. Courtesy Cornell.⁶⁴

And if the Big Trees were too overwhelming to be picturesque, they were a bit too sedate, too rooted, to be sublime; the only pain one was likely to feel taking in the vast prospect of a sequoia's trunk was in the back of a pinched, craned neck. In the end, sequoias just plain did not look the part.

The Big Trees were simply too new, too unlike anything the West had ever seen.⁶⁵ As Fitz-Hugh Ludlow put it, “The marvellous of size does not go into gilt frames. You paint a Big Tree, and it only looks like a common tree in a cramped coffin.”⁶⁶ Like the Grand Canyon, another natural feature at first completely beyond the creative ken of the West, they initially existed in a narrative vacuum.⁶⁷ This failure to safely bind the sequoias with word or image often bred discontent for the tourist arriving in California, and for every John Muir-esque description of the sequoias that sails aloft on dizzying flights of hyperbole, there is an account suffused with a pouting feeling that “the trees do not look as you expected; they are not as large; ‘they look as

if somebody has stripped off their clothing, and left them in nightdress.”⁶⁸ Geologist and explorer J.D. Whitney wrote in a fit of pique, “the Big Tree is not that wonderfully exceptional thing which popular writers have almost always described it as being.”⁶⁹ Even Thomas Starr King found himself disappointed when looking at his first sequoia: he supposed it a sapling, merely, no more than forty feet around, even though such a wispy little thing would still be twice as large as Boston’s famous elm.⁷⁰

The baffling, silent sequoia groves ultimately allowed the imagination free reign, and provided the possibility to imagine a better, more just world emerging from the earth alongside the aged giants. While the George Gales saw no further than the wealth that might be stripped from a sequoia, and the Frémonts grubbed about on hands and knees “engaged in extracting the treasure from the chinks and pockets of Mother Earth,” others, contemporaries of Gale and the Pathfinder, found themselves haunted by the implications of a tree over 300 feet tall and nearly two-dozen feet in diameter.⁷¹ “What silence and mystery,” wrote King, who considered himself one of those sensitive souls upon whom Nature could make its mark. “How many centuries of summer has such evening splendor burnished thus the summit of the completed shaft,” he mused while lying underneath a particularly large sequoia in November, 1860. “How long since the quickening sunbeam fell upon the first spear of green in which the prophecy of the superb obelisk was enfolded? Why cannot the dumb column now be confidential...why will not the old patriarch take advantage of the ripple through his leaves and whisper to me his age? Are you as old as Noah? Do you span the centuries as far as Moses? Can you remember the time of Solomon?”⁷²

In the beginning, there was a tree. There always have been trees. There always will be. If they can speak (fabulous things sometimes happen), what would it have said? Walt Whitman spoke tree, and he translated:

Song of the Redwood-Tree

A California song,
A prophecy and indirection, a thought impalpable to breathe
as air,
A chorus of dryads, fading, departing, or hamadryads
departing
A murmuring, fateful, giant voice, out of the earth and sky,
Voice of a mighty dying tree in the redwood forest dense.

*Farewell my brethren,
Farewell O earth and sky, farewell ye neighboring waters,
My time has ended, my term has come.*⁷³

Into the void created by the Big Trees' frame-shattering newness rushed all manner of competing attempts to give meaning to the limbs and crown and roots deeply burrowing through Californian soil. Financial gain was on many a mind, but surprisingly few advocated outright for logging. Both J.M. Hutchings and Galen Clark opened tourist lodgings in sequoia groves, acted as guides, and worked to promote the area for its scenery—they were early sequoian conservationists. John Muir never tired of singing the trees' praises, and by the 1870s and 1880s, countless photographers had sold thousands of images to the public.⁷⁴ As the nature tourism industry came of age in the later half of the nineteenth-century, the Big Trees became one of the must-see sights on any grand tour of the United States, and there was little trouble envisioning them as natural, sustainable source wealth: if money didn't exactly grow from their limbs, tourist dollars certainly sprouted in their shade, as long as the axes were kept at bay.

But there is a more complex narrative—at the same time competing and in league with the narrative of wealth—that begins to develop as soon as Hutchings publicizes Dowd's discovery: these trees were undoubtedly *American*, the equivalents of the Egyptian pyramids and

Roman ruins, and they were increasingly seen as monuments conferring the sort of ancient cultural capital that would allow the U.S. to hold its head high amongst other modern nations. The trick that the sequoias had to perform, though, was that California was absolutely *not* a strictly American space. Until the Gold Rush, California's Indians far outnumbered non-Indian populations.⁷⁵ And for three hundred years the land had been claimed first by Spain and then Mexico; Spanish names—San Francisco, Los Angeles, the Sierra Nevada—dotted the landscape. Aside from that, California was an intensely cosmopolitan place: the rush for easy wealth meant that the Harvard-educated sons of upper crust Boston Brahmin mucked about in mines alongside Chileans, Mexicans, Indians, former-Confederates, African-Americans, Chinese, and many others. Finally, California was the bull's-eye of western geopolitics, the point of intersection for Western imperial desire. Besides Spain and Mexico, Russia had planted its nation's flag on Californian soil, beginning in 1812 when the Ross Colony, located just north of the Russian was established by Russian merchants who sent Aleutian Island and Kodiak Island Indians to hunt for sea otter, farm the land, and even begin industrial production all in service of the mother country.⁷⁶ And so it took an almost perverse will to assert that California was American in any sense at all.

It was this historical, multicultural context that American nationalists tried to make the sequoias efface, and the most effective, or at least most common strategy was to imagine the trees as essentially trans-historically American.⁷⁷ If the was only ever the prologue to the specificity of Today, then there could be no prickly identity crisis: nations, tribes, empires might come and go, but the trees remained, they were timeless, and because they were imagined to be outside of history, there was no need for them to be rational, or for tree time to flow linearly. They could be prophets, they could connect the present with a long-gone past, they could be

made to testify that California had been American long before a single white foot ever touched a square inch of North American soil. Indeed, the Big Trees were used to proclaim that the U.S. was almost immeasurably old: one pamphlet trumpeted that before the Mother of the Forest was stripped bare, she had witnessed “the career of that mysterious person, the Wandering Jew,” and the fetish with counting tree rings in order to note when Christ would have appeared is a trope that begins in the 1850s, is further popularized by John Muir, and became such a standard way of reinforcing the mythical, mysterious, antiquity of the nation that Alfred Hitchcock staged part of his *Vertigo* (1958) amidst the sequoias.⁷⁸

After all, the very political history of America itself was sometimes literally bound in covers of bark.

Charter Oak! Charter Oak! tell us a tale,
Of the years that have fled, like the leaves on the gale,
For thou bearest a brave animal on they brown root and stem,
And thy heart was a casket for liberty's gem.⁷⁹

The story of the Charter Oak, used to spirit away the constitution of Connecticut from Sir Edmund Andros and King Charles II, was well known in the nineteenth-century, and the lyric that Henry George set to music for his *Charter Oak! Charter Oak Ancient and Fair!*—adapted from a poem by Lydia Sigourney—would have resonated widely. The Great Elm of Shackamaxon, under which William Penn reputedly “bought” his demesne from the American Indians in 1682, was revered throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and when George Lehman published his print *The Great Elm of Shackamaxon* in the 1820s, he provides us with obvious indicators of the tribute owed to the elm: all of the important buildings—the churches, government buildings, business houses—are blessedly sheltered underneath the elm’s spreading limbs.⁸⁰



Figure 76: George Lehman, *The Great Elm Tree of Shackamaxon*, c. 1820. Courtesy AAS.

And of course, there was the carefully-tended legend of Washington's cherry tree.

It shouldn't be any surprise, then, that when war broke out between the North and South, trees were quickly pressed into service for metaphorical battle—as well as materially for masts, hulls, gunstocks, and firewood. As North and South hacked away at each other's flanks, popular imagery kept pace. Collectible Civil War envelopes—the commemorative post cards of the nineteenth-century—were often illustrated with highly metaphorical scenes of the North-as-pine-tree doing battle with the South-as-palmetto, the state trees of Massachusetts and South Carolina respectively asked to do double iconological duty. And so we get images of General Bragg hung from a palmetto; secessionists leaving the Union by dismemberment; General Winfield Scott as a

logger chopping down the Tree of Secession; and an image of a white pine delivering the fatal, decapitating blow to a palmetto, underwritten by a few lines from Bostonian Oliver Wendell Holmes: "Enough of speech; the trumpet rings!/ Be silent, patient, calm:/God help them if the tempest swings/ The *Pine* against the *Palm*!"⁸¹





Figure 77: *The Bragg Fruit of Hanging Tree-son*, 1861; *Secessionists Leaving the Union* c.1861-c.1865; *The Downfall of Secession Treas-on!* c.1861-c.1865; *"Enough of speech; The trumpet rings! Be silent, patient, calm: God help them if the tempest swings The pine against the palm!"* c.1861-c.1865. Courtesy AAS.

In an almost dreamlike way, trees become people, states, governments; logging becomes purifying war, limbing mutilation, and fruit hanging bodies.⁸² Indeed, by 1865 a frequent depiction of Jefferson Davis shows him dangling from a sour apple tree, culturally suggestive both of the North (sour apple trees were prized for their juice which lent character to hard cider, the stereotypical drink of New Englanders), and of a perverted, unpalatable nature.⁸³ Of course, the sequoias were also asked to do their part for the Union, and conscripted ranks of trees with

names like Uncle Tom's Cabin, Abraham Lincoln, U.S. Grant, and General Scott, a literal Birnam Wood prophesying the defeat of the Confederacy, waged cultural war against the South.⁸⁴

When the guns finally fell silent, Americans looked over their shattered landscape wondering how to heal.⁸⁵

6.

Again, Whitman:

Along the northern coast,
Just back from the rock-bound shore and caves,
In the saline air from the sea in the Mendocino country,
With the surge for base and accompaniment low and hoarse,
With crackling blows of axes sounding musically driven by
strong arms,
Riven deep by the sharp tongues of the axes, there in the
redwood forest dense,
I heard the mighty tree its death-chant chanting.

The choppers heard not, the camp shanties echoed not,
The quick-ear'd teamsters and chain and jack-screw men
heard not,
As the wood-spirits came from their haunts of a thousand
years to join the refrain,
But in my soul I plainly heard.

Murmuring out of its myriad leaves,
Down from its lofty top rising two hundred feet high,
Out of its stalwart trunk and limbs, out of its foot-thick bark,
That chant of the seasons and time, chant not of the past
only but the future.⁸⁶

By the 1870s, many Americans, including Whitman, were searching desperately for some way to bind the wounds of the Civil War cut deep by the tongues of sharp axes, to culturally, spiritually reincarnate the Union as the United States.⁸⁷ George G. White's vastly popular "*Father I Cannot Tell a Lie: I Cut the Tree*" (1867) is drenched in the rhetoric of a healing

national mission. We see young George on his family's Southern plantation, confessing his mistake. But rather than receiving a thrashing for his wanton act of destroying a fruit-bearing tree, we get the image of a gentle father, lovingly looking down at his son, perhaps delivering a lecture on virtue and stewardship, seemingly pleased with his son's honesty. Indeed the relationship between father and son, rather than the cutting of a tree, is the visual, rhetorical center of the image. To the left, the skies are sunny, cloud free, but on the right side of the frame, directly above the wounded tree—and note, it has not received the fatal blow, but a flesh wound, even though a limb has been whacked off—we see storm clouds, though rapidly fleeing the scene. In the background, happy slaves return from the fields or lounge languidly upon a fence, watching the Grandfather of the Nation train his sapling of a son to be upright, strong, and straight talking. It's an image that operates on two time registers: safely, and metaphorically as an imagined scene from the distant past, but also as a modern day parable, forgiving the recent attempt to dismember the Union, glossing over the horrors of slavery, and promising great things to come.



Figure 78: George G. White, *"Father, I Cannot Tell a Lie: I Cut The Tree,"* 1867. Courtesy AAS.

Firmness, imperturbability, the ability to withstand fierce storms, raging fires, lightning strikes coming vengefully from above, and the competition of other trees from below: these were all attributes of the sequoias which suddenly seemed exactly the sort of tonic to mend the body politic. In Otis J. Williams's guide to the sequoias and redwoods, there is a panoramic painting of words describing "an entire forest, extending as far as the eye can reach, of trees from eight to twelve feet in diameter...their trunks marvelously straight, not branching until they reach one hundred to two hundred and fifty feet from the ground."⁸⁸ It took little imagination to see these almost anthropomorphized trunks and limbs as men and women, as an American multitude, healthy, straight, and strong, purified by the fires of war, a new people ready to inherit the future prophesied by the Big Trees.

Visitors to the sequoias frequently cast the trees in a nationally healing, unifying dialect of imperialism, connecting the vastness and grandeur of the trees to the exceptionalism of the American project. “Passing on from the eastern district, marked by its equably distributed rainfall, and therefore naturally forest-clad,” wrote a lucidly dreaming Asa Gray as he retold the tale of his transcontinental trip for his audience, “I have seen the trees diminish in number, give place to wide prairies, restrict their growth to the borders of streams, and then disappear from the boundless drier plains; have seen grassy plains turn into a brown and sere desert – desert in the common sense, but hardly anywhere botanically so; have seen a fair growth of coniferous trees adorning the more favored slopes of a mountain range high enough to compel summer showers; have traversed that broad and bare elevated region shut off on both sides by high mountains from the moisture supplied by either ocean, and longitudinally intersected by sierras which seemingly remain as naked as they were born; and have reached at length the westward slopes of the high mountain barrier which, refreshed by the Pacific, bears the noble forest of the Sierra Nevada and the Coast Range, and among them the trees which are the wonder of the world. As I stood in their shade, in the groves of Mariposa and Calaveras, and again under the canopy of the commoner Redwood, raised on columns of such majestic height and ample girth, it occurred to me that I could not do better than to share with you, upon this occasion, some of the thoughts which possessed my mind.”⁸⁹

There’s only one period in that sentence, one unbroken spatial, temporal, arboreal movement towards the western wonders of the world: unstoppable, inevitable, a sylvan Manifest Destiny of trees, nation, people, the borders between each fuzzed, Nature’s Nation a nation of trees, and the sequoias the indisputable culmination of the type, “the king of all the conifers in the world, ‘the noblest of the race,’” as John Muir put it.⁹⁰

So it's a great irony that the sequoias were almost named for an English war hero. In 1853, English botanist John Lindley, having received a few samples of cones, foliage, and wood, named the new trees the *Wellingtonia gigantea* after the general who bested Napoleon at Waterloo. Few Americans outside of Asa Gray's Harvard University took notice of Lindley's appropriation, but luckily for U.S. nationalism, the next year, while George Gale and others got down to the work of making the Big Trees pay, the French botanist Joseph Descaine decided that *Wellingtonia gigantea* was not an entirely new thing under the sun; it was, he argued related to the redwood, a tree named by the Austrian linguist and botanist Stephen Endlicher, *Sequoia sempervivens*. And so Descaine decided that the Big Trees ought to be named *Sequoia gigantea*. When Asa Gray and his mentor, John Torrey, began popularizing the trees as *Sequoia gigantea*, the name stuck.⁹¹

Here's an historian's joke: an Englishman, a Frenchman, and two Americans are arguing over whom the Big Trees should commemorate.

"Wellington," says the Englishman.

"But, excuse me," replies the French botanist, visibly offended and unwilling to acknowledge English might, either militarily or scientific. "There's an Austrian precedent."

The two Americans confer with each other and then take a vote: "we've decided," they say, in unison: "sequoia it is!"

But the punch line is this: the trees were named in honor of a person who may or may not have ever existed, someone who may have only lived in the sanitized, imperial, uneasy fever dreams of white America.

Now Whitman sings in an imagined indigenous voice:

*You untold life of me,
And all you venerable and innocent joys,
Perennial hardy life of me with joys 'mid rain and many a
summer sun,
And the white snows and night and the wild winds;
O the great patient rugged joys, my soul's strong joys unreck'd
by man,
(For know I bear the soul befitting me, I too have
consciousness, identity,
And all the rocks and mountains have, and all the earth,)
Joys of the life befitting me and brothers mine,
Our time, our term has come.*

*Nor yield we mournfully majestic brothers,
We who have grandly fill'd our time;
With nature's calm content, with tacit huge delight,
We welcome what we wrought for through the past,
And leave the field for them.*

*For them predicted long,
For a superber race, they too grandly fill their time,
For them we abdicate, in them ourselves ye forest kings!
In them these skies and airs, these mountain peaks, Shasta,
Nevadas,
These huge precipitous cliffs, this amplitude, these valleys, far
Yosemite,
To be in them absorb'd, assimilated.⁹²*

The story gets told and retold, handed down through the years, so much so that its path can be tread mindlessly by feet that seem self-directed.

The genus was named in honor of Sequoia or Sequoyah, a Cherokee Indian of mixed blood, better known by his English name of George Guess, who is supposed to have been born about 1770 and who lived in Will's Valley, in the extreme northeastern corner of Alabama, among the Cherokees. He became known to the world by his invention of an alphabet and written language for his tribe. This alphabet, which was constructed with a wonderful ingenuity, consisted of eighty-six characters, each representing a syllable; and it has already come into use, to a considerable extent, before the whites had heard anything about it. After a time the missionaries took up Sequoyah's idea, and had types cast and a printing press supplied to the Cherokee nation, and a newspaper was started in 1828, partly in this character.⁹³

The tale of the “Cadmus of the Cherokee” first made headlines in the 1820s, and though next to no hard evidence has ever surfaced, the broad outlines of the Sequoyah story have been repeated faithfully and become accepted truth in much the same way that A.T. Dowd continues to win credit as the discoverer of the Big Trees. In the early nineteenth-century, Sequoyah or George Guess, or sometimes George Gist, a son of a Cherokee mother and German man—invariably an outsider, marked as different, even amongst his own tribe: sometime mixed-blood, sometimes living on his own like a hermit, sometimes lame—becomes obsessed by “talking leaves,” or written notes which he sees American traders and missionaries passing to each other. In some stories, Sequoyah is a serious alcoholic, but his investigations into the mysteries of the talking leaves become an even more potent lure than strong drink, and he gives it up—as well as nearly everything else, including supporting his wife and children. Thanks to the charitable work of local missionaries who, depending on the narrator, lend various amounts of help to the budding Cadmus, Sequoyah one day hit upon the logic which allowed him to craft a syllabary of 86 characters (or 85, or 92; these small details change frequently), whose use rapidly, some might say miraculously, spread amongst the Cherokee. It was a wondrous invention, “a phenomenon unexampled in modern times” wrote one traveler in 1828, even if it was a rude language incapable of the subtle artistry, the fine turns of phrase, the inherent brilliance many Western commentators assumed was indigenous to English.⁹⁴ And so, the “illiterate Indian genius” became, in the words of one of his earlier biographers, “the only man in history to conceive and perfect in its entirety an alphabet or syllabary.” All that in little more than a decade of work.⁹⁵

The problem with this story, which even today goes largely unexamined, is that it far too conveniently fits into the colonial narrative of white superiority.⁹⁶ The strife which characterized Southeastern politics in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-centuries—bitter feuds between

Indians and American squatters and politicians, and between factions within the Cherokee nation itself—winds up triumphally silenced.

In 1971 an Indian history of Sequoyah was published by Traveller Bird, a direct descendent of the actual Sequoyah, and the tale is vastly different: there never was a Sequoyah, because that name is meaningless in Cherokeean. The actual person was known as Sogwili, or George Guess, a name Sogwili appropriated from a white raider he caught and killed for stealing Cherokee cattle. There was never a German father in Sogwili's life; rather he was the offspring of a native man and woman. In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-centuries the Cherokee nation was riven over conflicts between the Progressives—who wanted to assimilate—and the Conservatives. The Conservatives, including Sogwili, fought to preserve their ways, one of which was the Scribe Society, a cadre of powerful Cherokee who had passed the secrets of writing down from one generation to the next since, at least, the fifteenth-century—and lest this sound fabulous, remember that literacy has traditionally been a tool of the powerful, whether it be church masses conducted in a dead language like Latin, or slave owners forbidding their slaves to learn to read. Presciently fearing that Cherokee lands would be overrun by gold-seeking white settlers—the hills of Georgia and Arkansas were cursedly rich with the metal—Sogwili founded a colony of Cherokee in the Mexican province of T  jas at the end of the eighteenth century.

But Sogwili couldn't leave well enough alone, and he returned constantly to the Southeast, supporting the Conservatives who remained, and antagonizing the Progressives. In 1795, Sogwili made the fateful decision to dissolve the Scribe Society, to open the Cherokee language to all Conservatives in an anti-colonial effort to resist white cultural invasion—a sort of democratizing of the liturgy. For this he was found guilty of witchcraft by a jury of Progressives, who cut off his ears, all of his fingers, and branded him on the forehead.

By the eighteen-teens, however, word of native literacy was starting to leak out: Conservatives were writing messages to each other everywhere, even on trees, stymieing missionary efforts to Americanize, and control, the Cherokee. Rather than admit to an indigenous language developed independently of the West's civilizing light, a counter-narrative was devised. The disgraced Sogwili, clearly, could not be made into the Cherokee Cadmus, so another man, whose name was George Gist—Gist was close enough to Guess for the purposes of imperialism—was given the name Sequoyah, and an invented background of mixed-blood ancestry tacked on to the fanciful name. When it came time to paint Sequoyah's portrait, Gist couldn't be found, and Sogwili had only stubs for fingers, so Thomas Maw was chosen to represent the founder of the Cherokee language.⁹⁷



Figure 79: L.T. Bowen, *See-Quo-Yah*, 1838. Courtesy AAS.⁹⁸

There's nothing triumphally American about Traveller Bird's history and when Sequoyah's name was given to the Big Trees, it was the story of a rude savage who ingeniously crafted a language before heading west into oblivion that was grafted onto the trees' trunks. America found itself with a supposedly entirely unique, entirely native, entirely natural symbol

of national, predestined might, an American syllabary of its own, one whose shape, longevity, and sheer might were all perfect for singing the song of U.S. imperial destiny.

If you could have asked an American of the middle nineteenth century what or who Sequoia was, what would the answer have been? A tree? A remarkably learned Indian? An obnoxious renegade, or freedom fighter, named Sogwili? A man of German-Cherokee decent named Gist? A handsome painting of an Indian with long, graceful fingers and unblemished features? Perhaps, the best answer would simply have been this: an unknown, a man whose last name was cryptically, unknowably Guess.

8.

Then to a loftier strain,
Still prouder, more ecstatic rose the chant,
As if the heirs, the deities of the West,
Joining with master-tongue bore part.

*Not wan from Asia's fetiches,
Nor red from Europe's old dynastic slaughter-house,
(Area of murder-plots of thrones, with scent left yet of wars
and scaffolds everywhere,)
But come from Nature's long and harmless throes, peacefully
buildd thence,
These virgin lands, lands of the Western shore,
To the new culminating man, to you, the empire new,
You promis'd long, we pledge, to dedicate....
Here build your homes for good, establish here, these areas
entire, lands of the Western shore,
We pledge, we dedicate to you.*

*For man of you, your characteristic race,
Here may be hardy, sweet, gigantic grow, here tower
proportionate to Nature,
Here climb the vast pure spaces unconfined, uncheck'd by wall
or roof,
Here laugh with storm or sun, here joy, here patiently inure,
Here heed himself, unfold himself, (not others' formulas heed,)
here fill his time,*

*To duly fall, to aid, unreck'd at last,
To disappear, to serve.*⁹⁹

There's a bizarre and ironic process of appropriation and reimagination occurring in the nineteenth-century, as if a snapshot of the nation is being doctored to show, not reality, but one very particular dream of what the country was or could be. Metaphors pile one on top of the other, higher and higher until anything grounded gets left behind in flights of almost pure fancy, though there is almost always an unavoidable undercurrent of anxiety, the dream always on the edge of spinning horribly out of control. American Indians played a central, and paradoxically, vanishing role in this production: they lent the credibility of nativity even as their scene faded to black.

Sometimes, straight, unadorned facts—as far as such things are not simply historians' fantasies of objectivity—can jostle one from the waking dream. 1795: Sogwili is mutilated for his attempts to resist Americanization and appropriation of Cherokee land. 1825: The “Cherokee Problem” is one of the hottest political issues in Georgia.¹⁰⁰ 1830: The Indian Removal Act paves the way for the dislocation of the Cherokee, among other southeastern Indian tribes, and even the intervention of the Supreme Court in 1831 and 1832 on the behalf of the Indians can't stop the removal process. John Ross, the elected Chief of the assimilationists, compared the treatment of his nation to “a solitary tree in an open space, where all the forest trees around have been prostrated by a furious tornado.”¹⁰¹ 1838: The Cherokee are herded, at gunpoint, first into concentration camps, and then to Oklahoma, in the winter, and thousand die along the way.¹⁰² J.W. Gunnison, one of those who kept his human flock moving with the occasional jab of the bayonet would later write of another tribe:

The thievish rascals have been so thoroughly trounced and the measles have used up so large a number, that we shall probably have no annoyance from the few scattered & frightened ones left. This band which has been so fully thrashed & nearly

exterminated has been called the worst Indians & hardened fighters in the mountains,—and as the whole country of natives have suffered extremely from the measles, we hope that they will be peaceable for a few seasons. It is astonishing what infatuation has seized on the race of red men. They are not only at war with each other as tribe against tribe, but bands of the same tribe are fighting and destroying one another. It is a doomed race and following the law promulgated by God, that a people adhering to murderous idolatrous practices shall be extinguished.¹⁰³

1851: The Mariposa War of extermination renders Yosemite pure, untouched wilderness. 1856: Hale Tharp takes up residence in a giant downed sequoia in the years immediately following the Thule War, living amongst the Western Mono, and witnesses their decline as the southern Sierras start to fill up with miners and loggers. 1850s: The largest trees in the world are named for a Cherokee Indian who may have never existed, whose people had been forcibly, illegally removed from their land. 1868: geologist and explorer J.D. Whitney writes, “[Sequoyah’s] remarkable alphabet is still in use, although destined to pass away with his nation; but not into oblivion, for his name attached to one of the grandest and most impressive productions of the vegetable kingdom will forever keep his memory green.”¹⁰⁴

And then there are the massacres.

1850: Bloody Island Massacre, California.

1860: Wiyot Massacre, California.

1864: Sand Creek (or, if you prefer to attach the name of the man responsible, the Chivington) Massacre, Colorado.

1868: Washita Massacre, Oklahoma.

1870: Marias Massacre, Montana.

1871: Camp Grant Massacre, Arizona.

1890: Wounded Knee Massacre, South Dakota.¹⁰⁵

At the very same time that Indians were being driven from their lands and hunted down, during the very same decades when tales of Indian raids and the punitive massacres that followed hard on their heels filled the press, the sequoias were being celebrated as...American because they were Indian. Alchemy, shape shifting, pathetic fallacies where inanimate objects become human: all of these were deployed by a larger American culture in order to make Indians Natural, and Nature indigenous, a process of dissolving the very real outlines of each into a hazy, ideal image sympathetic to American imperial desire. How can a scarred Cherokee who fought to resist white incursions end up the symbol of white American greatness? By associating him with nature, a move that is, at the same time, elevating in that Indianness becomes something other than revolting, and demeaning because, in the modern world, nature is usually seen as separate and unequal to the human.¹⁰⁶ The trope of the vanishing Indian—in which, like Whitman's poem, one race inevitably yields to another more exemplary one—is presided over by the witness trees themselves, which bless the birth of the new man, the new country, the superior, long foreseen people. Trees become Indians, become Native Americans, but generically so: Emerson named the particular sequoia he liked Samoset. The very attributes that made the sequoias seem like such a natural symbol of the new nation—their great antiquity, their durability, their strength and endurance—were also many of the same characteristics idealized in the image of the Noble Savage. Savagery could be softened, appropriated by Americans looking to critique the perceived effeminacy of a decadent Europe: playing Indian performed American uniqueness. But a big part of what made the Noble Savage concept work was that, after all, Indians were seen as savages, a lower order on the great chain of development, bound to inexorably disappear, while their inherent nobility meant that they knew when they had been beaten, would graciously abdicate their place as the human inhabitants of the continent—like

Bunnell's Ahwahneechee—while also legitimating, indeed inviting the bulldozing of natural resources and the violent seizure of territory that the dream of American Progress depended upon.¹⁰⁷ Asa Gray could have been writing about American Indians when he asked, “are they veritable Melchizedecs,” comparing the trees to an ancient Jewish priest who was neither born nor would ever die, but would live in a preternatural suspension, forever, “without pedigree or early relationships, and possibly fated to be without descent...Or are they remnants, sole and scanty survivors of a race that has played a grander part in the past, but is now verging to extinction?”¹⁰⁸ Even the word, “savage,” played this shape-shifting game: it originally derives from a cluster of words meaning forest, or tree.¹⁰⁹

And so the Big Trees—called sequoia, called Grizzly—like the Noble Savages, evolved into self-sacrificing figures inviting their own demise for the nation's well being. In a country recently rent by war, Sequoyah asked North and South to bury their differences along with their dead, and to turn to a destiny long foreseen by Nature and American Indian, to stitch the U.S. back together, to join hands in the ongoing work of America, seizing territory, and making money. Rooted in the same ground alongside U.S. Grant and Abraham Lincoln, stood General Lee and his group of five Confederates.¹¹⁰

Thus on the northern coast,
In the echo of teamsters' calls and the clinking chains, and
the music of choppers' axes,
The falling trunk and limbs, the crash, the muffled shriek,
the groan,
Such words combined from the redwood-tree as of voices
ecstatic, ancient and rustling,
The century-lasting, unseen dryads, singing, withdrawing,
All their recesses of forests and mountains leaving,
From the Cascade range to the Wahsatch, or Idaho far, or
Utah,
To the deities of the modern henceforth yielding,
The chorus and indications, the vistas of coming humanity,
the settlements, features all,

In the Mendocino woods I caught.¹¹¹

9.

At what point does relapsed tragedy become farce?

In 1879, the largest of the sequoias, the biggest tree in the world, was baptized General Sherman, named for General William Tecumseh Sherman, a man whose legal first name, until he was nine, was simply Tecumseh after the Shawnee leader who tried to forge a pan-Indian alliance across the Mississippi Valley in the early nineteenth-century to resist white incursion; Tecumseh Sherman found fame as the Civil War general whose scorched earth policy of total war left his route from Atlanta to the sea a smoldering wasteland, though in his own day he was perhaps only slightly less famous as the post-Civil War general whose hatred of the Indians seeped into his private letters, where he wrote that the Indian wars were “one of those irrepressible conflicts that will end only in one way, when one or the other must be exterminated.”¹¹² “Treachery is inherent in the Indian character,” he told a *New York Times* reporter in 1873, reacting to news of the war with the Modoc Indians of northern California—as it turns out, the last major armed white-Indian war in the state. Three days earlier he had telegraphed his commander in charge of field operations against the Modoc, “make the attack so strong and persistent that their fate may be commensurate with their crime. You will be fully justified in their utter extermination.”¹¹³

Extermination: a word Tecumseh Sherman never used in reference to his Confederate enemies, crops up with a grisly frequency in connection to Indians.

The dramatic irony—perhaps farce’s prime trope—of exterminators appropriating a supposedly indigenous name to the landscape, may be clear to you and I, but irony depends on a knowing audience. What we may see as tragedy was also a postmodern pastiche of

incompatibles that allowed for space to become triumphantly, providentially American. Metaphors and metonyms did their cultural work, making the unfamiliar legible, bounding off the unknown, creating and finding meaning and, in this case, touching up reality with fantasy so that, for some audiences, the illusory and the actual rhymed. Into the cultural void living under the shade of the Big Trees stepped mimicry, and identities were scrambled, redistributed and reappropriated in all sorts of different ways, but the mimicry was never perfect, nor was it intended to be. When Sequoyah was described as the Cherokee Cadmus, it was always with a comic, knowing wink shot at a white audience by white authors, that of course, Cherokeean could never become the equal of a Western language, that Sequoyah was in fact a shabby bit-player aping the mythical creator of the Greek alphabet. There's a bizarre moment in the Rev. F.R. Goulding's *Sal-O-Quah; or, Boy-Life Among the Cherokees*, when, after elaborately praising Sequoyah's invention, the narrator flings all sorts of contempt at the Cherokee who seemingly will not graduate to a *real* language and leave the pig Latin of their own syllabary behind. No matter how miraculous its invention, Cherokeean was not a proper language to most nineteenth-century white Americans—though it may have been alright for savages. The Cherokees' refusal to grasp this, to move up the rungs of the ladder of development perplexes the good Reverend, and only confirms for him that Indians are naturally inferior.

Mimicry can be an incredibly versatile cultural multi-tool, with specialized blades for all sorts of particular jobs.¹¹⁴ With one, noble attributes could be lopped from savagery; and with another, stuck onto trees; while with a third Native Americanness could be peeled off like bark and displayed to the nation's white populace: Tecumseh's fierce determination split from his role as an enemy of American expansion and stuck onto the body of the man pledged to safeguard Manifest Destiny. With yet another blade, the farcical one, the one that cut nature and Indians in

each other's images, mimicry marked those forced into aping as always outsiders. As a tool of dispossession, miming became the mark of unsuitability—one only had to mime where one could not speak the dominant language—the uniform that signaled to a privileged audience, *this person does not belong*. “Truth and a more intimate acquaintance with this ‘paragon of animals,’” wrote Colonel Frank Triplett in his *Conquering the Wilderness* (1883), “compel us, however, to doubt [Indian] lordly attributes, and on nearer view he is seen to be filthy in person, speech and action; cowardly in conduct; selfish in feeling; brutal in mind, and false in everything.” It didn't matter to Triplett what languages Indians invented, nor did it matter if they were generous, eloquent, brave, strong; if they farmed, or dressed in European clothes, or cut their children's hair and sent them to missionary schools: the very fact that they did these things exposed their inherent inferiority. Wilderness, wild animals, and Indians—bits of a collage whose entirety represented an unruly nature to be tamed—existed simply to “make way for the superior energy and higher mental and physical attributes of the white man, who seems ordained by Providence to dominate the world.”¹¹⁵

There's yet one more blade tucked away in mimicry's handle, its double switchblade-edge intended for the nineteenth-century audience, as well as you and I, an edge that relies on the enduring power of irony, for one of irony's effects is to distance an audience from the production; indeed, one formulation of irony is that it depends on the audience having knowledge of the past, present, and future that the characters of the story cannot have, that we know something that they don't, that we have a God's eye, imperial view. In many ways, this is the predominant, perhaps the only trope on which modern academic history relies: critical distance. Yet distance can be insulating. David Foster Wallace is helpful. Rilke, too.

Irony: do not let yourself be governed by it, especially not in uncreative moments. In creative moments try to make use of it as one more tool of grasping life. Cleanly

used, it too is clean, and one need not be ashamed of it; and if you feel you are getting too familiar with it, if you fear this growing intimacy with it, then turn to great and serious objects, before which it becomes small and helpless. Seek the depth of things: thither irony never descends.¹¹⁶

In fact I often think that one of the prime effects of farce, of irony is to wall audience and action off from one another, to turn us into safe spectators, merely, or at best, comfortable, superficial critics who confuse exposing the gap between rhetoric and reality with creating a better world. And the point I want to make is that we cannot let this happen, must not allow ourselves to breathe easily behind the secure facade of research, theory, critical distance, Progress. We must not allow irony, or the performance of irony, to make us cold.¹¹⁷

10.

The flashing and golden pageant of California,
The sudden and gorgeous drama, the sunny and ample lands,
The long and varied stretch from Puget Sound to Colorado
south,
Lands bathed in sweeter, rarer, healthier air, valleys and
mountain cliffs,
The fields of Nature long prepared and fallow, the silent,
cyclic chemistry,
The slow and steady ages plodding, the unoccupied surface
ripening, the rich ores forming beneath;
At last the New arriving, assuming, taking possession,
A swarming and busy race settling and organizing everywhere,
Ships coming in from the whole round world, and going
out to the whole world,
To India and China and Australia and the thousand island
paradises of the Pacific,
Populous cities, the latest inventions, the steamers on the rivers,
the railroads, with many a thrifty farm, with machinery,
And wool and wheat and grape, and diggings of yellow
gold.¹¹⁸

And so...the wool and wheat and grape, and diggings of yellow gold all came from somewhere, came from a landscape, were grown and picked and dug by someone, were part of

an economy. It's not an overstatement to say that Indian labor built California, and one of the chief advantages for capitalists was that labor costs were so cheap.¹¹⁹ Native laborers were often paid nothing more than food and clothes, if they were paid at all: before, and even after, the Civil War, the profits from Indian abduction and slavery bought many a fine suit for America's free marketeers. After the Mexican American War, California's Indians rapidly lost their demographic dominance and with it, their geo-political might. As roving bands of Savages increasingly rode out on their mounts to oust Indians from their traditional lands, those that survived found ready work, if not wages, in the mines, as domestic servants, and especially, as agricultural laborers—until, that is, white laborers saw Indians as undercutting their wages. What ended up developing, whether by intention or improvisation, was the creation of a class of permanently migratory, permanently disenfranchised people who could either be ladled into the labor pool, impounded on one of the state's few reservations, or—as historically has been the case with the “free market”—if they proved not docile enough, if they proved to demand too much in the way of human dignity or monetary compensation, they could always be exterminated.¹²⁰

If it's true that violence was one of the chief characteristics of the social and economic interactions between Californians—land wrested from Indian, Spanish, Mexican hands; feuds between prospectors; mountains made to bleed out their veins into mine owners' coffers; trees stripped, and felled—than it is also true that the landscape came to bear witness.¹²¹ The peaceful sequoian groves free of human voices or activity are the traces of physical and cultural violence, the sequoias—not the physical, material, independent-of-humans Big Trees, but that thick mix of material Big Tree and cultural sequoia—were never simply an antidote to capitalism, to violence, to exploitation; they were its flipside, connected from the very first to the race for wealth, power,

and dominance. Today we might say that the sequoias were the greenwashing masking, making exploitation palatable.¹²²

Yet trees have always been unpredictable witnesses; too much cultural weight on too many limbs, and the whole thing could come crashing down, exposing the unworkability of the sham. And so even as so many labored so diligently to turn American Indians into mere sylvan traces, trees called sequoias refused to fully obscure the indelible blot of imperialism; they stood like silent monuments, and one didn't have to linger amongst them for very long before feeling the brutal absurdity of a sequoia named Sherman: the forests remained haunted by past and present atrocity. No matter how hard they tried, the damned spot, the mark of the past, would not come out, not even if you scraped at it with one of mimicry's blades.¹²³

For what if those mimics were not miming? What if they were twisting the script, using its language but inflecting it with their own sly nods and winks? What if they mocked the audience to its face?¹²⁴ Mimicry, after all, is metaphoric, it is based on two completely different things forced into equivalency, but its literary power to delight depends on the ultimate difference of the two. It depends on recognizing difference. Sequoyah was *not* Cadmus, not in any way. He was a literate Indian who may have deployed his peoples' language in order to resist white control, a historical character with his own agency whose story, it was feared, might not follow the safe narrative of brute genius and eventual extinction. He might talk back, and in his native tongue. If the denigrating power of farce—the power which allows the privileged to chuckle at the impossibility of Indians as cultural equals of the West—ultimately depends on difference, then there is always the fear that difference is inassimilable, uncontrollable, unknown and unknowable, a menace waiting to rear its head.¹²⁵

It's this rising panic that drove an obsessive Tecumseh Sherman to clip hundreds of newspaper articles about "the Indian Question"—"Captured by Indians. Remarkable Adventure of an Iowa Woman and her Son. Emigrants Massacred. Mrs. Jones Made a Slave to a Yankton Chief"—and paste them into a scrapbook.¹²⁶ What did the sequoia stand for? The long prophesied triumph of America was certainly one answer, and its proponents struggled mightily to ensure that narrative's dominance. But there was a nagging notion that the paper-thin appropriation of Indianness and Naturalness could not contain the burden of the past, a past filled with massacre. And what if it wasn't safely passed? Indeed, trees had always been ambiguous cultural witnesses, testifying to both sin and salvation.

For all of the blithe pronouncements on the divine Americanness of the sequoias, there is a real feeling of anxiety in the constant musings about what secrets the trees hold, what testimony they will tell, an anxiety rooted in the strangeness of the things, their refusal to fit into one standard narrative frame.¹²⁷ When Thomas Starr King wondered, "Are you as old as Noah? Do you span the centuries as far as Moses? Can you remember the time of Solomon," I hear a quaver in his voice, a fear that the past's nasty secrets might be no more secretly hidden than the bundle of letters in the old shoebox.¹²⁸ It's a worry that J.M. Hutchings can't quite conceal, either, even with an exclamation point and a pointedly-chosen adjective: "Could those magnificent and venerable forest giants of Calaveras county be gifted with a descriptive historical tongue, how their recital would startle us, as they told of the many wonderful changes that have taken place in California within the last three thousand years!"¹²⁹ Perhaps Hutchings had heard the tune *The Indian Hunter*, had pitched in as the piano thumped out the music to be played *quasi vivace*, or almost lively, in which the last, lone Indian wonders:

Oh why does the white man follow my path,
Like the hound on a tiger's track,

Does the flush on by dark cheek waken his wrath,
 Does he covet the bow on my back?
 He has rivers and seas where the billows and breeze
 Rear riches for him alone,
 And the sons of the wood never plunge in the flood,
 Which the white man calls his own.
 Yha then why would he come to the streams where none
 But the red skin dare to swim,
 Why would he wrong the hunter who
 Never did harm to him?
 Yha, yha, yha....¹³⁰

This fear of injustice and its eventual revenging is one that Helen Hunt Jackson would give explicit voice to, in 1881. With Tecumseh Sherman, perhaps, in mind, she wrote, “innate cruelty is not exclusively an Indian trait,” before turning to Sequoyah’s people: “In the whole history of our Government’s dealings with the Indian tribes, there is no record so black as the record of its perfidy to this nation. There will come a time in the remote future when, to the student of American history, it will seem well-nigh incredible.”¹³¹ She’s saying, in a way, that the spectral past will stalk future generations, that we’ll all be haunted.¹³² Haunting is the feel of a denied history’s on the shoulder, a sense of a past that is never quite safely dead and buried, the tell-tale heart that will not remain silent.

Many tales of haunting take place in a forest.

Sometimes incredible things happen. Sometimes trees speak. And sometimes we listen. Eadweard Muybridge, that trickster photographer whose compositions are one-act dramas compressed into the deep space of a perfectly made photograph, was also at work in the sequoias, and his image, *The Astonished Wood-chopper, 5 feet 10 inches high, 3 feet 2 inches cir.*, pokes fun at pretensions to American grandeur, contrasting the superlative height and girth of the sequoias to the utterly ordinary figure of the American woodchopper.¹³³

This image for research purposes only.
Source: American Antiquarian Society.

MARIPOSA GROVE OF MAMMOTH TREES.
Published by BRADLEY & RULIFSON.
Illustrated by MUYBRIDGE.

MARIPOSA GROVE OF MAMMOTH TREES.
Published by BRADLEY & RULIFSON.
Illustrated by MUYBRIDGE.

1905 The Astonished Wood-chopper, 5 feet 10 inches high, 10 inches wide, 10 inches deep.

What I love about Muybridge's photograph is how it teasingly reminds us that the long feared past can come bellowing into the historical silence of nationalism from the throat of a Big Tree.

Fresh come, to a new world indeed, yet long prepared,
I see the genius of the modern, child of the real and ideal,
Clearing the ground for broad humanity, the true America,
Heir of the past so grand,

To build a grander future.¹³⁵

11.

To build a grander future. Whitman's poem, a draft of a roadmap, leaves us at the crucial crossroads. He's led us into *terra incognita*, alone with our own devices. There's a radical openness at the end of *Song of the Redwood-Tree*, one more silence: "I see in you, certain to come, the promise of thousand of/years," he sings, but what is that promise? What grander future did he hear the trees prophesy?

12.

It has been hard, for many in the post-1960s U.S. political mainstream, to take communes and communards seriously, to see them as anything other than an over-idealistic group of utopian dreamers located far out on the edges of an already fringe counterculture, especially when compared to pragmatic conservationists and preservationists, folks like George W. Stewart—"The Father of Sequoia National Park"—and Gifford Pinchot, or the even more "rational" captains of industry. All-too-frequently, communes tend to be seen as always destined for failure, peopled by well-meaning but tragically naive do-gooders. There are many reasons for this, including, perhaps most importantly, the cultural backlash against the 1960s back-to-the-land movement, especially amongst the Left. It's a staple of Hollywood and post-60s literature, and that has been one of the great triumphs of those who trumpet the perfect hegemony of capitalism: their narrative, that there are no alternatives, has been repeated so frequently that it has come to stand in for the truth. Competitive Individualism And The Race To The Top Is Pragmatic, Successful: It Is The Way The World Works, And History Has An End. Yet, the communal dream has never died, and indeed, at times was so popular as to be almost ordinary. It's not just

the radical abolitionists who had communes, or Bronson Alcott's anarchists, or the free lovers, or the Owenites, or the Associationists, or the Fourierists, or all those folks living in Massachusetts. Horace Greeley, the most influential journalist of the mid-nineteenth-century, was an outspoken Fourierist, and the town of Greeley, Colorado—now infamous for the stench of its stadium-sized Confined Animal Feeding Operations in which tens of thousand of cows dejectedly await “the stunner” and the long, flashing knife held by the hands of equally exploited, dejected laborers—was originally founded as a utopian colony mixing socialism and private property.¹³⁶ And John Humphrey Noyes, whose Oneida Community was so popular in the 1840s, published a book called *History of American Socialisms* in 1870, at a point when the U.S., reeling from the shocks of the Civil War, was supposedly devoted to capitalism. The book is forty-eight chapters long, nearly seven hundred pages, each chapter detailing a different socialist effort. Between 1800 and 1914, there were something like 260 viable secular socialist societies throughout the United States, and if we count Catholic and Protestant religious orders, Shaker and Mormon communities, Rappites, Icarians, and the dozens of small ethnic religious enclaves such as Zoar in Ohio and Ebenezer outside of Buffalo, New York, there is a good argument to be made that communalism, as much as rugged individualism, has been the key to American development.¹³⁷ Indeed, the very first attempt at founding a socialist colony in the US was made by the Dutch Mennonite Pieter Cornelius Plockhoy in 1663 at the Valley of the Swans, near present-day Lewes, Delaware.¹³⁸

Socialist communes are as American as a march on Washington.

And though the widespread popularity of communes may have waned in the aftermath of the Civil War, interest in alternatives to economic individualism and mainstream politics, especially after the Panic of 1873 and the great railroad strikes of 1877, the most violent labor

upheaval up to that point, continued to grow.¹³⁹ Henry George, that critic of the transcontinental railroad, whose *Progress and Poverty* (1879) argued, in an almost ecological way, that exploitation was not part of an ethical life, that land was the real and only source of wealth and thus everyone had an inalienable right to it, was widely read, and spurred intense political discussion throughout the country. As John L. Thomas put it, George envisioned the unfettered human as a mixture of the earthly and the divine, “the mythic earth tree with his roots in the ground and his topmost branches brushing the heavens.”¹⁴⁰ Militant groups of laborers, like the Pennsylvania coal miners who formed the Molly Maguires threatened their recalcitrant bosses with violence, while larger organizations such as the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor attracted support from tens of thousand of workers across the country. In Haymarket Square, Chicago the threat of a spreading, uncontrollable, foreign anarchism was blamed for the deadly bomb that went off at a labor rally in 1886, and the violence of the Homestead Strike in the 1890s—in which laborers armed with guns and dynamite confronted Andrew Carnegie’s band of Pinkerton mercenaries—was front page news. When Eugene V. Debs headed the Pullman Strike of 1893-1894, national transportation literally screeched to a halt. Debs, of course, would later run for president on the socialist ticket and receive nearly 6% of the popular vote, before being jailed for the seditious, un-American act of preaching pacifism during World War I. On the cultural front, Edward Bellamy’s 1888 novel *Looking Backward* was a bestseller *despite* its wooden narrative. It was Bellamy’s social vision of harmony that so thrilled readers, a glimpse of a better world, and Bellamy Clubs, 162 in all, sprang up throughout the country.¹⁴¹

The confounding popular interest in a politics that can very generally be called socialist, is, I think, what makes it difficult to write about the communal impulse in the context of

American history. It's not just that the communal drive seems to be a subgenre of the subfield of labor history, but that U.S. history is often told in terms of the triumph of liberal economics and individualized democracy. There's an implied force of teleology at work that liberalism and the free market are, of course, the only real options for the exceptional U.S.; and it's hard to shake this, even for those who themselves study communes.¹⁴² Indeed, Donald Pitzer, whose theorization of developmental communalism has done much, recently, to revive scholarly interest in communes, tends to take it for granted that there is only one possible end for socialistic communes: dissolution.¹⁴³ The question, then, is: how does one write about failure without closing off the possibility that existed at the moment?

The question is: what is failure?

13.

The empty, park-like Kaweah landscape was something new under the sun for those yearning to breathe free. "The scenery is sublime," boasted Burnette Haskell, "the eternal white-capped mountains of the Sierra Nevada are in full view, while the mountain gorges and canons, with their majestic water-falls, are spoken of in raptures by those who have been fortunate enough to view them."¹⁴⁴ It was just such a fortune that drew economist W. Carey Jones to visit the colony in 1890, and in his report to *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*—not the sort of outlet known for its empyrean flights of landscape description—the numbers man devoted seven entire pages to the surrounding scene: "A few miles above where the three branches [of the Kaweah River] join...this modern village community is situated on both sides of this copious, powerful, and healthful branch of the river." The air was pure, the breeze bracing, and "on either side rise ranges of mountains which seclude the hamlet from the world and protect it from the

cold, storms, and winds.”¹⁴⁵ It was a sheltered haven from which crops and socialism could together grow unmolested, the wealth not of nations but of a community, until they were strong enough to brave the maelstrom.¹⁴⁶

J.J. Martin understood himself to be a practical person, a man of action, but still impressionable enough to catch the message of change carried on the breezes tumbling from the summit of the Sierras, relayed through the sequoias surrounding Kaweah, and into his ear. It was a beautiful spot, so different from his native England and the other American cities in which he had lived: Galveston, New Orleans, San Francisco.¹⁴⁷ It looked and felt to the Englishman like the sort of place from which a glorious future could be nurtured, the new world’s fresh green breast sustaining utopian cooperation. “The heat is greatly modified by refreshing breezes,” he wrote to members of the colony who had not yet taken up residence among the trees: “The nights are perfectly glorious. The air is pure and invigorating. Springs of cool water are plentiful, and shade is abundant.”¹⁴⁸ In this historical silence, Martin’s ears detected a pregnant pause, hopeful and fresh with the promise of America, an intense and vital promise born on the gently drawled vowel cluster—sounding a mix of surprise and contentment—bringing the word, their home, to a close:

Kaweah.

The name, like many, has multiple provenances, and the first Western mention of the river from which the colony took its name is the Spanish Rio San Gabriel. But by the middle of the nineteenth-century it had been rebaptized Kaweah, which may have referred to the Gaiwa Indians, a band of Yokuts who lived along its banks; or it may have meant “raven” in Yokut, or perhaps the “river of the calling raven,” or, as Burnette Haskell—who named his own plot Arcady—liked to tell it, simply meant “here we rest.”¹⁴⁹ Whatever the true meaning of

“Kaweah” may be it’s clear that the colonists felt that the nobility of the Indians for whom Kaweah was named could be regained, could be used to scrub clean the filth of competitive individualism into which the race for profit plunged the U.S.¹⁵⁰

Martin had been in on the idea from the very beginning. In 1884, at a picnic hosted by the San Francisco chapter of the Knights of Labor, Martin discussed the labor question and its possible solutions with his friend the organizer, lawyer, and newspaperman Burnette G. Haskell, and about 100 others. Haskell had been a devotee of anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon as well as Karl Marx, and in 1882 founded a secret socialist reading group named the Invisible Republic; at around the same time he also began printing his newspaper, *Truth*. By 1883, his radicalism aglow, Haskell created a revolutionary organization based loosely on the Marxist First International called the International Workingmen’s Association, an organization which sought to bring anarchists and socialists together, and which would in time become fairly important in California labor struggles.¹⁵¹

Even revolutionaries need a picnic now and then, and at this one ideas for reforming the competitive system were passed back and forth along with the wine and bread, each a different, exciting dish: some favored education, others immediate and violent revolution, while still others felt that letting evolution take its course was the best path to socialism. The reformers were deadly sober, as well as hopeful that their plans for hatching a better, more socially just world *had* to bear fruit. Underneath all the heated rhetoric, the posturing, the competition to be the most radical—which I am sure must have been on display (it depressingly comes out in their later records)—there’s a profound philanthropy at work. Looking back on the birth of Kaweah, one of the colonists would write, “If faith in humanity is lost, *all is lost*, and there is no hope left.”¹⁵² A few months later, the very beginnings of a plan were put in motion: an organization would be

formed, called the Co-Operative Land Purchase and Colonization Association, which empowered each one of its members to “consider himself a committee of one to seek out opportunities to purchase.”¹⁵³

The idea was to create a new space, a space completely different from the capitalistic, competitive space of the free-market, one that integrated work, leisure, and living, a revolutionary space that allowed for the fullest development of each individual even as it fulfilled the social needs of security, health, and industry. Using Laurence Gronlund’s newly published *The Co-Operative Commonwealth: An Exposition of Modern Socialism* (1884) as their bible, Martin, Haskell, and comrades launched their crusade: “We claim there is something wrong in Society which vitally affects the whole nation and every individual of it,” they shouted along with their mentor. “Its admirers give it a more euphonious name: *Private Enterprise*.”¹⁵⁴

And so the revolutionaries fanned out, eyes and ears alert, searching for a plot of land from which they could stage their peaceful revolution. Thanks to disease, violence, and the dislocating pressures of the gold rush, the California landscape seemed a fallow, inviting wilderness: by 1880, California Indian populations numbered only around 23,000 down from about 300,000 when Spain began colonizing the area a little more than one century before.¹⁵⁵ Land that had previously belonged to Indians, the Spanish, and Mexicans, if it hadn’t already been appropriated by individual owners or the railroads, was owned by the federal government, which sought to turn those perfectly square sections into tax-paying farms through the passage of various bills.¹⁵⁶

But there was a catch: all of these bills sprang from the utopian Jeffersonian faith in the small, yeoman farmer, and so care was taken to ensure that the land went to individuals, rather than corporate entities. It’s a vision of land and citizenship not too far removed from what Henry

George was both promoting and being vilified for, yet all of the land acts were fatally flawed: through various loopholes and dishonest practices, corporations and wealthy absentee owners managed to exploit the laws for their own gain, amassing thousands of acres which could be disposed of as investment opportunities appeared.¹⁵⁷ And so federal land agents—at least the honest ones—were constantly looking for anything that smelt like an attempt at land monopoly.

In 1885, C.F. Keller, a member of the Co-Operative Association, was on a Southern Pacific train heading back to San Francisco from a land-scouting trip, and as luck would have it, he happened to overhear two surveyors—or were they timber speculators?—discussing land for sale in and around the Giant Forest, directly in General Sherman's shadow.¹⁵⁸ Timber cruisers for the bigger logging operations had declared the land inaccessible, and therefore no one had thought to snatch it up.¹⁵⁹ It simply wouldn't pay. But for socialists, the prospects were promising, and when Keller reported his find to Martin and Haskell, they reacted quickly. On October 5th, 1885 forty-two individuals went to the land office in Visalia, California and filed their claims for land in and around the Giant Forest of Sequoias. With something like twelve square miles of land to their collective names, and with a plan to merge all of the land under one entity, the Kaweah Colony was no longer a dream but a reality complete with demarcated boundaries.¹⁶⁰

To get to the colony, one headed east from Visalia, the seat of Tulare County located in the fertile San Joaquin Valley, along Mineral King Road, laid down by miners who hoped to blast their way to wealth. The road climbed into the foothills of the Sierras, and after twenty-five miles, one came to the small village of Three Rivers, where the North, Middle, and South forks of the Kaweah River met. It was cooler here, wilder, and the forests began to thicken, the trees to grow in height. At Three Rivers, the revolutionaries left the road, and headed north along the

North Fork of the river. When they got to the spot that would soon become the Kaweah Townsite, they looked around in awe at “a place of great spring beauty and always of charm.” Philip Winsor, the English hop-picker who spent his nights pouring over Thoreau, Emerson, and Louisa May Alcott, left his native England to join the colony in the later 1880s, and when he arrived, he wrote that the landscape seemed protective, seemed to cradle the infant revolution: “the hills shut us in on all sides; down the canyon the Three River’s Peaks apparently closed the entrance and the sides were flanked by chamiso, chapparel and oak dotted hills, with manzanita and buckeye fairly plentiful. The former carried pretty pink and white clusters of heathery bell like bloom in spring, having a honey fragrance and they changed to the small green fruit, the origin for its Spanish name, little apple.”¹⁶¹ The area had been used as grazing land for sheep and cattle since the 1850s, and was renowned for its richness.¹⁶² There was water, sunshine, cool weather; there were marble deposits, and Moro Rock, a huge granite dome in the center of the Colony, provided unparalleled views of the sierra and the sequoias. Most importantly, there was timber in great supply. Everything was at hand that the communards needed to create a utopian space, one that would allow “ample time for recreation and study...[remove] incentive to crime...[promote] happiness, fosters education and [assist] invention. It opens wide the gates to all who desire to revel in the fields of science and art. Its religion is ‘do unto others as we would they should do unto us.’ It is evolution—a step higher in the scale of human existence, or if you please—the dawning of the long prophesied millennium.”¹⁶³

14.

There’s a deeply intertwined mix of nature and culture in Kaweahan dreams: art and science grow in fields; the engine of biology, evolution, gives rise to their political economy;

land and labor ensure each other's integrity, and if one is divorced from the other, both decay. The space itself seemed utopian—one only needed a fitting society, the proper landmarks. And so when the Colonists took possession of their land, one of their first acts was to stream into the Giant Forest and exorcise the personification of murder, nationalism, and plunder from the largest tree in the world. They expelled General Sherman and substituted a new name: Karl Marx.



Figure 81: The Kaweahans in front of Karl Marx. Photo by C.C. Curtis, c. 1887. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

It's not the utopian agrarianism of Timbuctoo, though work was every bit as important in the Californian woods as in the Adirondacks: rather than cultivating freedom through husbandry, the Kaweahans understood that the sequoias themselves were prophets of a breaking future, the

very trees under whose branches they lived a part of their social vision. Key to the survival of the Colony was the timber: the Kaweahans would log, even amongst the Big Trees.

Log amongst the Big Trees.

This might seem sacrilegious to today's environmentalists—Sierra Clubbers and tree-sitters, alike. Why not, while we're at it, hammer away at a cathedral for paving stones, or sow our fields with salt? But a leave-no-trace environmentalism, however well it may be suited to backcountry wilderness trips, has almost no relevance to the social, cultural, and environmental problems that we all find around our cities, farm fields, roadways, factories, and dumps; it leaves us with a world in which nature only exists where humans are absent, a profoundly misanthropic, ironic world. Infect an entire city's soil with PCBs and then leave with only a parting apology, the way GE did in Pittsfield, Massachusetts? Regrettable. Drop a beer bottle in a park? Sin, and one risks being ticketed by a ranger for penance. We must leave a trace if we are to live, and we need an environmental ethics that can help us to leave our marks healthfully and justly.¹⁶⁴

This, I think, is what makes the Kaweah Colony so radical: they proposed an economic, social, and environmental system that could sustain human as well as non-human life. Again and again, the communards write that they have no intention of felling Karl Marx or any of his sequoian comrades. Indeed, their sawmill was located nearly eight miles from the biggest stands of trees, though their road continued into the Giant Forest itself.¹⁶⁵

This wonderful belt of timber [the Giant Forest], the most valuable portions of which are already in the possession of the Colony, has the reputation of being the finest body of timber in California. Here the crop of a thousand years, which by actual measurement and cold blooded calculation amounts to several millions of dollars in value awaits the application of our industry. The Sequoia Gigantea attains a height in some instances, of four-hundred feet, with a diameter of from twenty to forty feet. It would be nothing short of vandalism to indiscriminately destroy these sentinels of past centuries, as has been done in several parts of California, by ruthless ravagers of the Competitive system and care will be taken to preserve them in their primitive glory.¹⁶⁶

Instead, they fought fires, and even proposed to build a scenic hiking trail so that others could admire both the social organization of the commune and its natural setting.¹⁶⁷ “None of the big trees were to be touched,” wrote, J.J. Martin: “they were regarded because of their age and size as sacred.” Instead, he offers a vision that we might today call sustainable, a continual process of “cultivation and reforestation” which doesn’t look all that different from the scientific conservation of Gifford Pinchot, except that it is infused with a profound respect for other living things and has little to do with corporate profit.¹⁶⁸

Besides that, sequoias make poor lumber: the Kaweahans knew this, even if many contemporary California boosters chose to ignore this fact in the hot pursuit of a dollar.¹⁶⁹ Not only were the biggest of them far too large for the mills of the day—the other logging operation in the Sierras blew the trees apart with black powder—the wood was brittle, and not very desirable for construction. Much more suitable were the stands of sugar pine, spruce (the preferred building material in the twentieth-century), and fir. The economist W. Carey Jones noted that the Kaweahans’ land was thickly forested enough with these other more suitable species of trees to supply “an immense market for many years.”¹⁷⁰

Whereas the other logging camps in the Sierras were just that—camps, temporary squatting grounds for exploited migrant laborers run by owners living somewhere comfortably removed from the work of stripping the land—Kaweah was a home, the communards would be logging not some far-off resource, but in their own backyard, even if they did live in tents. The late nineteenth-century saw the rise of suburbanization, and one way to think about suburbs is as little enclaves isolated from the sites of production. They are alienated landscapes, detached from the work of living; they are the spaces of industrial capitalism where those who can, wall themselves off from the realities of exploitation, and where those who can’t, don’t matter.¹⁷¹ One

analogue to the suburb is the wilderness area, likewise spatially distant from the working world, and so easy to believe in its pretend naturalness. But the Kaweahans lived where they worked, arguing that the tree in the suburban backyard isn't just an instance of nature in the city, it can also be the very thing literally giving us sustenance. It's the thing tying the method of getting a living to living itself. It's the Tree of Life.



Figure 82: C.C. Curtis. Kaweah, c. 1887. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

15.

“The labor movement is profoundly impressed with the spirit of the age,” wrote Haskell after the Colony was destroyed. “Whether it know it or not, the bugle of evolution has given the guide to every file of its broadening and marching flank...and we, its dreamers, were but a skirmish line of the main body.” If there’s a sense of communal inevitability threading its way

through the socialists' thinking, it's also true that this thread reinforces the connection with the outside world, with the outside environment, and one way to see the Kaweahan project is as an example of local, regional development.¹⁷² The first of two ambitious projects began almost immediately: the colonists came up with a plan to build a railroad from the Giant Forest down to the Southern Pacific mainline, a way to shunt their products into the arterial mainstream of American commerce. This proved impractical in the short term, but in 1886 the colonists began building an eighteen-mile wagon road from Kaweah Townsite, past Haskell's Arcady up through the settlement known as Advance, and eventually into the stands of timber.¹⁷³ Farmers and settlers in the San Joaquin Valley may have had perfect weather and deep soils, but they weren't blessed with an abundance of trees, and the Southern Pacific Railroad was charging a mint to ship lumber from the northern part of the state into the Valley, despite the fact that plenty of timber stood only a few miles away. "There is not a building of the better class constructed entirely of material produced in the county," wrote the editor of the *Historical Atlas Map of Fresno County*, in 1891. "In a frame house it will be found that the rafters, studding and floors came from Puget Sound, the wainscoting, rustic, and shingles, from Mendocino, the doors and sash from Shasta," all shipped along the S.P.R.R.'s lines.¹⁷⁴

At the same time that the Kaweahans were establishing the productive economic footing of their experiment, they launched their second project: putting into practice a political economy that, they hoped, would grow from the sierras and eventually, by dint of its eminent practicality and fairness, spread throughout the world. This was the Time Check system, a way of fundamentally reorganizing work—and thus one's relationship to the material, non-human world—along cooperative lines, and it came swaddled in all sorts of revolutionary sayings intended for the picket-sign, like "cost is the limit of price."¹⁷⁵ The concept was simple. All

wealth, the Kaweahans thought, flowed from two sources: land and labor, and money was but a poor approximation of value. Instead, Kaweah's economy would revolve around the Time Check, a system whereby the time and "life-force" expended in any job, including the artistic and intellectual, would be fully repaid the laborer, with no margin of profit, thus eliminating the temptation to exploit bodies or natural resources. This also made the things they would sell the outside world—like lumber—cheaper, because there was no profit margin built in. The more time and the more sacrifice it took to create a good, the more it was worth, and since there was no value-added profit, those who worked the hardest were rewarded the most richly. The overseer would never make more than the farmer, the engineer more than the miner.¹⁷⁶ It's utopian, sure, and we can scoff about the practicality of scientifically defining "life value" (is the dollar a better measure?), but even the hard-boiled economist, Jones, wrote that, "on the whole, I can say, although the comparison does not do them justice, that their life is fuller, better, and more profitable than that of either the average California farmer or the members of the average California village."¹⁷⁷ It was an economic system tuned to yield full, healthy, fulfilling lives, and it proved to be popular: J.J. Martin reported that Kaweah, at the time of its dissolution, had 615 members—though never more than 150, and more frequently somewhere between fifty and seventy-five, actually lived in the forest.¹⁷⁸

At first blush it might seem like the Kaweahans spent the majority of their intellectual steam rethinking labor and compensation, that they left the other half of the basis of wealth—land—behind. Yet underlying the Kaweahans' Time Check was a mixture of French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's contention that private property is thievery and Laurence Gronlund's argument that all products "have sprung from nature, and contain in them a certain amount of human labour."¹⁷⁹ What Proudhon and Gronlund meant by this was not that private property—

owning your own clothes, or tools—is wrong, but that landed property, that the productive capabilities of the land, could belong to no one. The process of seizing land, wrote Proudhon in his *What is Property?* (1840), renting it out to others to work, and then claiming a portion of the workers' harvest as payment was completely immoral, on three levels: the productive capabilities of land were gifts that belonged to all of us, and so seizing land and declaring it one's own was the first case of theft. To then rent the land back to those from whom it had been taken was basely cynical. Finally, to claim from the laborer a portion of that which was truly his—that thing he had made or grown through his own genius—under the pretense that the landowner had some natural right to whatever sprang from the earth, was antisocial theft, pure and simple: "Property and society are utterly irreconcilable institutions," wrote the French anarchist. "Either society must perish, or it must destroy property."¹⁸⁰

There's a nascent environmental principle at work in Proudhon and Gronlund's thinking, one that refuses to write environmental considerations off as mere externalities to the more important working of the market. Because land belongs to all of us, Proudhon wrote that the laborer "is responsible for the thing entrusted to him; he must use it in conformity with general utility, with a view to its preservation and development; he has no power to transform it, to diminish it, or to change its nature.... In a word, the usufructuary is under the supervision of society, submitted to the condition of labor and the law of equality."¹⁸¹ This is a sort of mutual aid, an idea of evolution guided by cooperation that predates both Darwin and Kropotkin, and it is the sort of environmentalism that was radical because it was so expansive. One might object that it is an unreconstructed anthropocentrism, that Proudhon's view is that human society is the only society that matters, and that could be true. But it's important to note that Proudhon refers to his ideal laborer as a usufructuary, as someone who has a moral duty to leave the landscape as

productive, as healthy, as beautiful as she found it precisely because the land must always remain unowned, belonging only to a much larger society. The productive capabilities of a stream, a field, or a forest must never be diminished. For the anarchist Proudhon the greatest guarantor of an individual's right to grow unfettered according to her own genius lay in community, lay in ensuring that the wealth of the world was never used up, but remained available, to everyone, always, a sort of ultra-radical sustainability. In this sense it anticipates Aldo Leopold's famous land ethic: "a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."¹⁸² Enclosing the land, seizing the products of another's labor is wrong, we could say mixing Proudhon and Leopold, because in the end it impoverishes not just the individual laborer, but the whole living system, and so everybody and everything in that community. What makes Proudhon and Gronlund such radical thinkers from the standpoint of mainstream modern environmentalism is precisely that they don't limit themselves to thinking only about the environment, a word we often, even those of us who know better, use solely for the non-human world of soil, trees, animals, and climate, but that they focus their attention on the points of human-nature interaction. "The relations of the State," wrote Gronlund, "to its citizens, is *actually* that of a tree to its cells."¹⁸³ Everything that lives has a desire to keep living, and to do so healthfully, according to its own genius. We all have a responsibility to society and to the land. The alternative, as Gronlund put it, was a system that dismembered both humans and nature: "The labouring men are dealt with by our managers as mere tools. They are spoken of as tools, as things. This humanitarian age counts steers and sheep by 'heads' and the workers by '*hands*.'"¹⁸⁴ If John Muir's brand of environmentalism tells us what not to do in when we are in the woods, and is silent when we return to the cities, Proudhon

and Gronlund follow us into the forests, through the fields, and into our backyards, indeed into our very economic arrangements, a place John Muir and even Aldo Leopold feared to tread.¹⁸⁵

But almost none of this came to pass. For while the communards planned to revolutionize society, there was what looks at first like an unlikely combination of interests working to undercut Kaweah. First, newspaper editor George Stewart, who would in time become known as the Father of Sequoia National Park, began heatedly advocating for some sort of nature reservation.¹⁸⁶ Ever since 1878 he had been lobbying anyone who would listen for the preservation of the Big Trees, and he was bolstered by the example of the newly-dehumanized Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees, which Abraham Lincoln had granted to the state as a park in 1864. By the 1880s Stewart's vision had come to encompass a Sierran alpine preserve consisting of tens of thousand of acres, and many farming interests in the San Joaquin Valley actively supported Stewart's crusade because they had been persuaded, and rightly so, by a flood of environmental thinking reaching back to George Perkins Marsh's epochal *Man and Nature* (1864), that without forests the mountain water that irrigated their fields would dry up before it had the chance to percolate into the ground.¹⁸⁷ John Muir, of course, joined in on the crusade for preservation, and likewise latched on to the benefits a park would render to farmers: "The value in these forests in storing and dispensing the bounty of the mountain clouds is infinitely greater than lumber or sheep," he wrote. "To the dwellers of the plain, dependent on irrigation, the big tree, is a tree of life."¹⁸⁸

Punctuating these voices calling for a park was the unsettling bureaucratic harrumph of the U.S. government. In yet another ironic twist in the story of the Big Trees, the Federal government had in fact never granted ownership to any of the communards. Since 1885, they had been, essentially, squatting. The problem was that on that October day in 1885 when forty-two

eager socialists filled the small land office in Visalia, it raised suspicions that these were not earnest settlers, but dummies purchasing land for a giant capitalistic timber corporation.¹⁸⁹ In fact, it was the soon-to-be Father of Sequoia National Park himself who first raised the alarm. These weren't idle fears: every land act, from the Preemption Act of 1841 to the Timber and Stone Act of 1878 saw massive fraud; indeed, corporate timber interests—including those directly related to the Southern Pacific—had already snatched up much of California's forests by such methods. Xenophobia also played a role: some of the Kaweahans were either not yet U.S. citizens, or simply had too-foreign sounding names, and Stewart would not believe that such people could come up with the filing fee for their land unless they were stooges for big timber interests.¹⁹⁰ And so he alerted the authorities.

When the Land Commissioner in Washington D.C. was apprised of the situation, he suspended the land claims, pending further investigation, which, in a long and convoluted process, first determined that the Kaweahans were entirely legitimate, and then that they entirely weren't.¹⁹¹ Though Stewart and some of his fellow preservationist friends were concerned about Kaweah, many locals were not—indeed, many seem to have been openly supportive of the venture; in fact it was the official land office agent in Visalia who advised the communards to squat until everything was cleared up, as surely it would be. If they improved their holdings, it would just go to show the federal land officers that they had filed their claims in good faith, and intended to stick.¹⁹²

Finally, it seems that the Kaweahans underestimated the wiliness of their capitalist foe, and were not quite as paranoid as they should have been. In 1885 or 1886, when the socialists were seriously considering building a railroad from the Giant Forest to the Southern Pacific's mainline, J.J. Martin strode into the office of the S.P.R.R.'s President, Charles Crocker to ask for

help. Crocker had been one of the Big Four investing in the Central Pacific Railroad, the western half of the transcontinental railroad, and had realized unimaginable wealth from his early investments. He was one of the most powerful men in the country, running one of the most hated monopolies in California. It took either an almost appalling lack of forethought or an incredible faith in one's own mission, not to mention no small share of utopian chutzpah, for Martin to march into the sumptuous office of one of the country's most successful and ruthless capitalists, announce one's socialist, anti-business sympathies (Did he throw in a quotation from Proudhon, "All men in their hearts, I say, bear witness to these truths," that "*property* and *robbery* are synonymous terms"? Did he shake his fist and yell, or pound his shoe on the table, "the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains?" I do hope so.), lay out a plan by which the capitalist system of the U.S. would eventually be eclipsed, while at the same time laying out the details of a business venture that would surely cut into the successful capitalist's earnings; it took either guts or naiveté to do all this and expect none other than Charles Crocker to lend a hand.¹⁹³

Did Crocker smile? Was there a nervous flicker in his eye?

He certainly took Martin seriously.

The local Southern Pacific land agent for the San Joaquin valley and the foothills of the Sierras was Daniel K. Zumwalt. One of the individuals tasked with figuring out how the S.P.R.R. could most profitably exploit the land, Zumwalt was also one of the fixers who straightened out tangled muddles in the company's interest, going so far as to convene kangaroo courts complete with all the pomp and circumstance intended to convey the railroad's authority. By the 1870s, Zumwalt had been instructed to personally investigate all new land claims in his bailiwick, and so it is not a stretch of the imagination, at all, to suppose that he knew of the Kaweahans' plans before Martin set foot in Crocker's office. He was also instrumental in furthering the

development of the San Joaquin Valley, which could only enrich the S.P.R.R. still more, as timber was shipped in and goods shipped out along the company's rails.¹⁹⁴

Finally, Zumwalt was also a preservationist—or conservationist? The line between the two starts to get awfully fuzzy when one looks closely enough—and as early as 1889 had signed his name to a petition urging the state to withdraw an area of the sequoias from the land market in order that the San Joaquin Valley's farmers might not see a reduction in their water, which would mean fewer crops, and thus less cargo for Zumwalt's employer. In October of 1889, at the request of the S.P.R.R., Congressman William Vandever introduced a bill to create a national park out of Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees, which were state parks at this point, but it was languishing in Congress—despite intense lobbying by the S.P.R.R. At the same time, Stewart seized the moment to present Vandever with a different bill, this one proposing a Sequoia National Park. This new Sequoia bill raced through Congress, and was signed into law without debate or amendment on September 25, 1890. The Kaweahans greeted this Sequoia bill with joy: the lands reserved were just to the south of their holdings, and preserved some of the finer trees in the Sierras from logging. Natural beauty and human community would flourish together.

One week later, however, on October 1, 1890, another bill was signed into law. It was the earlier Yosemite bill, which had stalled, but it had tacked onto it a huge expansion of Sequoia National Park, one that included nearly all of the Kaweahan's land.¹⁹⁵

No one really knows how or why the Sequoia Park enlargement made it into this Yosemite bill, but almost everyone agrees that the S.P.R.R. was behind it. Not only had the S.P.R.R. sponsored the original Yosemite bill, but the railroads' fixer, Zumwalt was in Washington during the passage, staying with his good friend, Congressman Vandever.¹⁹⁶ Richard

Orsi writes that “Zumwalt...had the bill amended at the last minute to add provisions more than doubling the size of the giant-sequoia park,” but as it turns out, almost no one knew that this language was actually in the bill—except for Zumwalt and the S.P.R.R.¹⁹⁷ The bill only referred to the proposed reservation by township number, and when Senator George Edmunds of Vermont asked for the bill to be printed so that he could study it more clearly and figure out what he and his colleagues were really voting for, someone, we’ll never know who, spoke to him, and he withdrew his request.¹⁹⁸ Once the bill was passed, no one knew what the implications were—except for Zumwalt and the S.P.R.R. The railroad quickly drew up a map of the enlarged park and its relation to their railroad lines before anyone in California knew what had happened. At about the same time, landscape photographers and painters started appearing in the Colony, courtesy of the S.P.R.R., not to photograph the achievements of socialism, but to create advertisements intended to lure passengers onto the S.P.R.R.’s trains and into the new National Park.¹⁹⁹ It seems pretty clear that, though there is no smoking gun, the enlarged Sequoia National Park, the one that contains the Giant Grove, the one that extinguished the claims of J.J. Martin, Burnette Haskell, and all the rest, the motive behind the park was not preservation at all—or rather, it *was* preservation: preservation of the S.P.R.R.’s wealth. Preservation of capitalism. Gold and sequoia.

Left naked and shivering, their land having been stripped from them without warning, the sensible thing would have been to concede defeat, and in truth the Kaweah Colony had just suffered its death-dealing blow. But the thing I’ve come to learn, and admire, about utopians is that no matter how loud the winner trumpets his triumph, their hope for tomorrow’s better world always drowns out the obnoxious din of today. And the Colony actually struggled on until April, 1892, unwilling to heed their own funeral dirge. For a time, the Kaweahans continued to cut

timber on the land they claimed was theirs, while sending petitions to Washington, assuring each other that their country was just and that it would all soon be sorted out. But then in December, four communards were arrested for timber rustling and shipped off to Los Angeles to stand trial.²⁰⁰ When, later that year, Kaweahans once again resumed cutting wood—this time on a legally patented claim some twenty miles distant from their disputed lands—it took 58 members of the U.S. Calvary to harass the Colonists—who, the officials back in Washington agreed, were doing nothing illegal—into nearly giving up.²⁰¹ It wasn't until 1892, when the trustees of the Colony were indicted for mail fraud for the heinous crime of sending out Colony propaganda and asking for donations—they were eventually all acquitted—that the utopians finally left their forest home: Sherman's men had expelled Karl Marx for good.²⁰²

16.

Incredibly, the Kaweahans were still not beaten, unconditionally. For a while many thought about relocating to Mexico, and J.J. Martin even left to start communes in British Columbia and Tasmania. The brief but brilliant flourishing of technocracy in the 1930s—a political economy which promised to end scarcity through rational management, abolition of capitalism, and an economic system remarkably similar to the Time Check—filled Martin with a hope that never really died. Indeed, he spent the rest of his life lobbying the Federal government to clear the Kaweahans' name and to reimburse them for the seizure of their land.²⁰³ Kaweah inspired other Californian communes, as well: Winter's Island and the Army of Industry both took encouragement from Kaweah's example, and even today, at Virginia's Twin Oaks, one of the longest running communes in the U.S., there's a building named Kaweah.²⁰⁴

17.

Poet George Pope Morris's 1837 poem, *Woodman, Spare That Tree!* was a hit, and Alan Dodworth knew it. Dodworth was a mid-nineteenth-century composer, and in 1848—that year when Marx and Engels wrote “A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism,” and Gerrit Smith reported that twenty or thirty black families had settled in the Adirondacks, that year when hopes for equality, dignity, and social justice ran so high—he borrowed Morris's poem and set it to music, a snappy up tempo ditty played in the left-right-left marching time-signature of 2/4, at an “Allegro Marziale,” a lively martial pace.²⁰⁵



Figure 83: Allen Dodworth, *Woodman Spare That Tree!* 1848. Courtesy, AAS.

It's of course unfair to judge sheet music by its cover, though that doesn't mean that we have to pay the illustration fronting Dodworth's *Woodman, Spare That Tree!*, no mind, a scene set beyond the fields, in the wild woodlands. It's not the city, it's not the country, it's literally at

the end of the road. And it's also important that the gentleman arresting the blow of the woodman's axe remains faceless, indistinct, universalized, the character we're supposed to identify with against the rude country rustic whom he nearly tackles. March, Dodworth tells us, hurry up and with a stiff spine defend the woods from the ignorant.

This bit of sheet music is, I think, the perfect soundtrack to the incorporation of mainstream environmental movement towards the end of the nineteenth-century, the sort of tune that George Stewart, and John Muir, Daniel K. Zumwalt, Charles Crocker and the U.S. Cavalry—which guarded both Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks for twenty-five years before the National Park Service was created in 1916—would have marched.²⁰⁶ The early history of mainstream environmentalism is filled with a sort of condescension aimed at those living in rural areas, a very clear upper-class bias, a separation of the world of work from that of play, the country from the city, an anti-democratic sentiment that certain enlightened individuals know best.²⁰⁷ Here's the Father of Sequoia National Park: "Protected from the ruthless hand of man there appears to be no reason why the oldest individual should not live indefinitely and enjoy a life of perpetual youth"; the early park supporters, Walter Fry and John R. White: "The Big Trees of the Sequoia National Park were providentially snatched from the hands of the would-be despoilers. Yet but for one or two public-spirited and far-seeing men in the San Joaquin Valley, those majestic forests...would have been hacked and murdered like other areas of the timbered Sierra"; and Muir, "Through all the wonderful, eventful centuries since Christ's time...God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches and a thousand straining, levelling tempests and floods; but he cannot save them from fools—only Uncle Sam can do that."²⁰⁸ The human hand, the working hand, the hand as synecdoche for a laborer, is only ever a destroyer.

However familiar this may all sound to us today, things did not have to turn out this way.²⁰⁹ Indeed, Morris's original *Woodman, Spare That Tree* is far subtler than Dodworth's tune suggests.

Woodman, spare that tree!
Touch not a single bough!
In youth it sheltered me,
And I'll protect it now.
'Twas my forefather's hand
That placed it near this cot;
There, woodman, let it stand,
Thy axe shall harm it not.

There's a sense of belonging, a deep sense of custody, and though it seems that the poet has moved from his ancestral cot, his sense of place, his care for the land has not changed. And pay attention to how he uses the word, "hand": it's a husbandman's hand, a caring hand, a hand that works in harmony with the landscape to rear and protect something nonhuman, but nevertheless familiar.

That old familiar tree,
Whose glory and renown
Are spread o'er land and sea—
And wouldst thou hew it down?
Woodman, forbear thy stroke!
Cut not its earth-bound ties;
Oh, spare that aged oak,
Now towering to the skies!

"Familiar," evokes kinship, the family, and a society of trees and humans spread o'er land and sea. The poet and his tree, his forefather and the landscapes he traveled through: all are stitched together by the tree's roots. It's significant that the tree is an oak, the sign of endurance, royalty, the sacred.

When but an idle boy,
I sought its grateful shade;
In all their gushing joy
Here, too, my sisters played.

My mother kissed me here;
My father pressed my hand—
Forgive this foolish tear,
But let that old oak stand.

Yet again, the oak is imagined as part of the family, protecting the poet and his sisters, witnessing parental affection. The past is gone, and there's certainly a sense of nostalgia, but the sacred tree yet lives, which, for the poet, means that the past has been resurrected. He's haunted in the Derridean sense, the past is close at hand.

My heart-strings round thee cling,
Close as thy bark, old friend!
Here shall the wild-bird sing,
And still thy branches bend.
Old tree! the storm still brave!
And woodman leave the spot;
While I've a hand to save,
Thy axe shall harm it not.²¹⁰

The poem ends on a militant note of firm resolve: the woodman shall not impoverish the poet's community of tree, family, and wild-bird. One could certainly read this poem looking for the poet's sneer—and I admit, that's how I first interpreted *Woodman, Spare That Tree*. But the more time I spend mumbling over its lines, the more I become convinced that the passion of the poet comes from the very real attachment that he has for that tree. It's a friend, it's a relative, it roots him to his past. It has taken human work to plant the tree and husband it, and rather than alleging that all work can only be violent, the poet makes sure to let us know that human hands need not be used only for destruction. Indeed, the poet asks us to consider *this* tree, not the entire forest. And while that might offend those with a highly-developed sense of scientific ecological interaction, I think there's a subtle acknowledgment that *some* trees must be cut down for firewood, for paper, for all of the million daily uses that we all have. That cannot be avoided, not even in this age of digitization, but that's not to say that everything growing is fair game for the

woodman's axe, nor that we should cut indiscriminately. The poet asks us to think about community and try to see that trees, birds, and landscape are parts of our families, as well. Emily Dickinson, in her characteristically clear-eyed verse, put the matter starkly, her suddenly-ending verse reminding us how dearly we need the sound of birds' calls:

No Bobolink—reverse His Singing
When the only Tree
Ever He minded occupying
By the farmer be—

Clove to the Root—
His Spacious Future—
Best Horizon—gone—
Whose Music be His
Only Anodyne—
Brave Bobolink—²¹¹

We need to preserve the trees that we grow up with.

This lesson was lost when the Kaweahans were forced from their land. Mills started popping up in the area in the 1850s, and soon dozens of lumbering operations were hacking deeply into groves of the Big Trees.²¹² Indeed, the Converse Basin, reputed to be the finest grove of sequoias in existence, was felled of every single tree, except for one, the Boole Tree, which the superintendent of the Sanger Lumber Company nobly named for himself.²¹³ Most of the sequoias, after being blown apart with black powder, went to the mills which together turned out tens of thousands of board-feet of lumber per day, to be turned into shingles, shakes, fence posts, garden stakes, or shipping crates. By 1905, eight different logging enterprises had completely cut over 2200 acres of land, and made over one hundred-million board feet of trees into lumber.²¹⁴

Yet, it's not as if the Colonists were perfect: the archives are filled with records of withering internal debates over minute points of socialist order, the sort of thing that, even at the historical distance of 120 years gives me a headache. Furthermore, one can fairly pick apart the

Colonists' claims to equality: though women *did* hold positions of power, they were often in the "women's sphere": education, crafts, and music. I'm nearly positive that there were no African-American communards, and certain that there were no Chinese or Mexican-American members. It's also true that the Kaweahans, except for a brief mention of the etymology of their name, have nothing to say about the Indians.²¹⁵ Though I don't think it's too much of a stretch to imagine that the Kaweahans would have condemned Sherman's solution to the Indian Problem, it's also fair to point out that the Kaweahans did nothing explicitly to stop the physical and cultural slaughter. Had they survived, who knows what their environmental legacy would have been? Perhaps a graveyard silence and public ownership of the Giant Forest was for the best.

Still, I can't bring myself to condemn the communards, nor to feel that the loss of Kaweah has been society's gain. For they remind me, again and again, that reimagining the landscape can revolutionize social, cultural, and economic interactions, that the fight for social justice must involve the physical, non-human world around us, that it's worthwhile to dream, and that enchantment has its own political value. The Kaweahans left their sheltered abodes and actually sought to change the world. They were utopians, and we should not condemn them for that. After all, capitalism has its *Gospels of Wealth* and Shrugging Atlases, the Alan Greenspans and Thomas Friedmans, all of whom reassure us—against the entire tide of the western historical experience—that an unbridled free market will deliver to each one of us all the riches, the personal freedoms, and the lives of fulfillment that we could possibly want, at absolutely no cost, as long as we, unaided, tug our own boots on in the morning.²¹⁶

The ghost of their California dream whispers to me that what we critics of capitalism need is not less utopian thinking, but explicitly, and realistically more of it.²¹⁷

18.

The Kaweahans didn't fail: they worked on the sly boundary separating fantasy from fact, and for a few years at the close of the nineteenth-century they lived in the world of their dreams.

19.

What is sequoia?

When I hiked through Sequoia National Park in the summer of 2005, I had no idea of its history, I knew nothing of the Indians who called it home, the naming debates, the communards. But I did watch the sun rise from the top of Mount Whitney, I did marvel at the Big Trees, and I did ask myself difficult questions. I wasn't alone on that backpacking trip: I was with my then-girlfriend, Talia, and it was there, under those trees, and on that mountaintop that we both realized that we wanted to spend the rest of our lives together. When Stewart and Zumwalt, the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Federal Government reserved the land as a national park, they preserved a certain sort of space. The quietness that Talia and I thrilled to is an intermission that comes only after the violence—of extermination, removal, felling and stripping trees—is over and before new homes are made. What the Park has done is to preserve that silence, indeed extended it retroactively so that it can be difficult to hear the whispers of the past. But that doesn't mean that the only story one can glean from the landscape is the triumph of conservation. We all, each of us, make our own stories.

Naming, like writing, is an act of possessing. There is always violence, a telling of certain stories at the expense of others. But naming, like writing, is also an act of being possessed. When we make our marks, we are marked in turn. And though no history, no landscape can ever be free of violence, some are more just than others.

What is sequoia? For some, it was an Indian, or a tree, a route to riches, a spectacle to be gawked at, or a symbol of a nation's chosenness. It was a revolutionary prophecy or a reaffirmation of the rights of conquest. It was very nearly an actual state, Sequoyah, one run by and for the Five Civilized Tribes in the first years of the twentieth-century.²¹⁸ Indeed, despite the knotty problem of the "real" Sequoyah, he continues to be a source of pride for many American Indians, who despite all of Sherman's best attempts, survived, continue to survive. And despite the best efforts of loggers to turn the trees into quick cash, they, too, live on. For Talia and I, sequoia means something else entirely.

What is sequoia? It's a mystery, a two-hundred-and-fifty-foot tall question mark whose almost fantastically long life—let's face it, if not cut down, blown up, stripped, or burned, if left untouched by the passing Gales, they're as immortal as any living thing can be—defies our notion of linear time and almost irresistibly makes us think of the past and the future, of where we have been, who we are, and where we are going. Of course, there is the very real bark and lignum phenomenal object, the thing endlessly studied by ecologists and foresters, but that thing is no more naturally sequoia than the park is a wilderness.

Sequoia, I think, is best imagined as a thick mixture of the physical tree and its intangible cultural trappings, a framework supporting open-ended stories whose many plot lines have been told, are in the process of being retold, and await future tellings, asking us to challenge our perceptions, encouraging us to question our world, demanding that we make connections beyond the here-and-now—and to stand, for even just a moment, astonished.

I'm tempted to end my tale with a quotation from Kaweah's Burnette Haskell who despite bitterness, poverty, a broken heart, and serious addictions to alcohol and perhaps cocaine, couldn't ever quite see his commune as a mistake: "Is there no remedy, then, for the evils that

oppress the poor? And is there no surety that the day is coming when justice and right shall reign on earth? I do not know; but I believe, and I hope, and I trust.”²¹⁹ But I won’t. My sequoias ask for more, and, anyway, I’ve spent too much time with the Kaweahans to settle for hope. Instead, I’ll close with Emily Dickinson, that “rare flower,” as Lewis Mumford called her, a poet whose poems have taken root somewhere deep inside of me, whose delicate petals not only topple walls, but more importantly seed the dream of a greener, living world.²²⁰

It’s all I have to bring today—
This, and my heart beside—
This, and my heart, and all the fields—
And all the meadows wide—
Be sure you count—should I forget
Some one the sun could tell—
This, and my heart, and all the Bees
Which in the Clover dwell.²²¹

EPILOGUE.

Enduring Obligations

"I got to figure," the tenant said. "We all got to figure. There's some way to stop this. It's not like lightning or earthquakes. We've got a bad thing made by men, and by God that's something we can change." The tenant sat in his doorway, and the driver thundered his engine and started off, tracks falling and curving, harrow combing, and the phalli of the seeder slipping into the ground. Across the dooryard the tractor cut, and the hard, foot-beaten ground was seeded field, and the tractor cut through again; the uncut space was ten feet wide. And back he came. The iron guard bit into the house-corner, crumbled the wall, and wrenched the little house from its foundation so that it fell sideways, crushed like a bug. And the driver was goggled and a rubber mask covered his nose and mouth. The tractor cut a straight line on, and the air and the ground vibrated with its thunder. The tenant man stared after it, his rifle in his hand. His wife was beside him, and the quiet children behind. And all of them stared after the tractor.

-John Steinbeck, 1939.¹

The first time I ever knowingly saw an elm tree was along University Avenue, in Fargo, North Dakota. I was 24. The irony was not lost on me, an Easterner, that I had to head to the treeless Great Plains to walk down an elm-shaded street, and I dearly wish that it had been an idyllic experience. But the roar of gasoline-powered compressors, each connected to a single American elm via IV lines through which life-preserving chemicals were being pumped made the experience rather more like strolling through a chemotherapy ward than along an Arcadian

promenade. The elms, like almost all surviving American elms, were dying, victims of Dutch elm disease, a disease that spread along international trade routes, a disease whose vector was wealth. The scourge first broke out in the U.S. in 1930—it had been ravaging what was left of Europe’s trees since the Great War’s guns had fallen silent—introduced by imported exotic lumber and the packing crates protecting luxury dishes. By 1933, as dust storms blasted the southern plains and soup lines stretched gauntly along city blocks, America’s elms were dying in droves: 77 million by 1980 had withered away, had been cut and burned in an offering of futile appeasement, an ecological calamity every bit as defacing as the Dust Bowl.² “An Elm can scarcely grow to old age without collecting rich human associations around it,” wrote the sylvan biographer, Donald Culross Peattie, but we’ve now lost these wooden witnesses and their historical testimony has blown away on a dry wind: Elm Street has become as meaningless and generic as all the named-for-trees avenues gracing suburban subdivisions.³ The various Elm Cities are consecrated to ghosts, and where once elms stood along Cornell University’s campus now sprout tombstones.



Figure 84: Memorial to the Ostrander Elms, Cornell University, 2012. Author's collection.

“If the American Dream had a home,” writes Thomas Campanella, surely the elms’ most poetic historian, “it would be tucked beneath the sunshot canopy of Elm Street, USA.”⁴ That canopy is gone, now, and so we stand squinting and wide-awake in an unnaturally bright light, wondering where we are

It’s true that not *all* the American elms have died: they are making a modest comeback thanks, in no small part, to DuPont’s chemicals and the genetic engineering of a patented, disease resistant strain called American Liberty, a tree wholly owned and controlled by the Elm Research Institute. Though there are two other organizations marketing disease-resistant strains—I can’t help but note that one of these is named “New Harmony,” a name strongly

hearkening back to Robert Owen's utopian socialist commune—elms are no longer a free gift, a bit of nature in all of our backyards, streets, and farm fields.⁵ They are now a commodity.

The dying elms are hardly alone. Ash trees are withering across the Midwest, East, and South thanks to the emerald ash borer, a stowaway that likely also came in packing crates. Balsam fir, the woodland smell to dream with, is in danger of a vast die-off, thanks to the practice of turning the northern woodlands into vast monocultures of the few species most desired by the construction market, species beloved of the budworm, which kills the Balsam's skyward growth. At the same time, red spruce is dying, melting away before the onslaught of acid rain. Eastern dogwood has been ravaged and is on the verge of extinction, while out West, Ponderosa pines are dying by the stand due to what was once mysteriously called "California X-disease," but which is really just good-old-fashioned California smog. Gypsy moths are denuding the forests of Michigan, and their human counterparts are busy cutting the remaining old-growth timber in the Pacific Northwest. Chestnuts, once a mainstay of East Coast forests and one of the most important trees to the American economy, have basically vanished: three to four *billion* of them had died by the mid-nineteenth century due to an imported fungus, and the deep cultural allusions—the old chestnuts—that we all used to understand no longer apply. Whatever we roast on the open fire, it doesn't grow in our woods anymore. Nature's nation, once a nation of trees, a nation whose very culture and language bore sylvan accents, may soon find itself writhing naked and mute beneath a pitiless sun, having traded our rich clothing, our nuanced language for not much more than the confidence man's promise of easy profit.⁶

And so the American witness tree could be cast as a tragic landmark standing silently, powerlessly by as Progress rumbled by in the seat of a bulldozer, as American culture became increasingly incorporated, as parking lots have replaced forests, as environment and society came

to be seen as two different, often antagonistic things: do we save people or nature, jobs or trees; do we care about social justice or conservation? Indeed, the nineteenth-century history of U.S. environmentalism could itself stand as an epitome of modern homogenization: the work of a surveyor/writer/poet/political-theorist/inventor/squatter/natural-scientist/walker/activist/ like Thoreau ceased to make much sense to those enthusiastically promoting American incorporation—one had to choose a single coherent identity. From Thoreau’s radical, multi-faceted cultural critiques to the elevation to the presidency, in 1901 of Theodore Roosevelt (mere months after the burnt carcass of the 1000 Mile Tree was cut down)—a man dedicated to wilderness and whiteness and the nation and martial manliness and the market; a man who was hiking in the Adirondacks when he received word that McKinley had been assassinated, and he, Roosevelt, the new president; a man whose first book was entitled, *Summer Birds of the Adirondacks in Franklin County* (1877), but whose most famous book, *The Winning of the West* (1889) begins, “During the past three centuries the spread of the English-speaking peoples over the world’s waste spaces has been not only the most striking feature in the world’s history, but also the event of all other most far-reaching in its effects and importance,” a man whose presidency established national parks, championed scientific forestry, and certainly helped to make environmentalism mainstream by demonstrating that neither conservation nor preservation would challenge Progress—given this trajectory, the safe containment of radical critique, the skeptic could justifiably proclaim the irony of green cultural resistance.⁷ After all, one of the most prominent versions of present-day U.S. environmentalism stresses consumption: if corporations will only plant a few trees or purchase carbon offsets, private citizens put their money towards Priuses instead of Hummers, and the Federal government support “clean” coal technology—a misleading bit of advertising if ever there was one—everything will be all right.⁸

Meanwhile, as any contemporary environmental critic who stands even slightly out of the mainstream can point out, the U.S. has been at or near the forefront of what seems for all the world like a head-long rush towards oblivion: the twentieth-century saw the growth of massive pollution, culminating, at least thus far, in the Superfund sites which are backyard neighbors to one-in-six Americans.⁹ Poisons that last for tens of thousand of years and are the byproducts of our nuclear tests and atomic energy plants—energy too cheap to meter, the hucksters told us—continue to build up, with no possible safe place for storage.¹⁰ Species extinction continues, even accelerates, and the breathless hunts for glimpses of things like the ivory-billed woodpecker seem like a ghastly farce, a last, desperate grasp for a splinter of wood even as a powerful undertow sucks us out to sea. The very sun itself has been turned into a weapon: when I was in grade school, we were constantly hearing about the disintegrating ozone layer, the CFCs in aerosol cans and refrigerators, the rising incidences of skin cancer, implored to slather ourselves in sunscreen and cover up to avoid deadly rays. But even this horror—our planet's life-giver turned into a massive irradiating toxic body—has recently taken a back seat to global climate change, and though there is near scientific consensus on the ultimately human, and especially Western, and even more pointedly American causes of our warming greenhouse, as well as a near consensus on the unpredictability of the future, though we watch as island nations drown, as drought increases, and as weather patterns become increasingly deranged, there is as yet no serious structural effort, among any political party in the U.S. to take even the most basic ameliorative steps. Instead, hydrofracking for natural gas, mountaintop removal for coal, and the surface mining of tar sands for oil—Drill, Baby, Drill! was the joyful Republican rallying cry in the 2008 presidential election—has meant that production and consumption and environmental destruction and social erosion tick ever upward like the long-term graphs of the Dow Jones, the

costs be damned. And though we all bear a share of those costs, it is, as always under a capitalist ethos, the meek who shall inherit the trash heap. “Modern society,” writes Murray Bookchin, “is disassembling the biotic complexity achieved by aeons of organic evolution. The great movement of life forms and relations is being ruthlessly reversed in the direction of an environment that will be able to support only simpler living things.”¹¹ No wonder much of what passes for the critical literature of environmentalism proclaims that population is a bomb, nature is dead, even that civilization itself is pathological.¹²

It often seems like we have two alternatives, neither very good: to blithely go shopping while the trees die, or to pessimistically prepare for a permanently uprooted life.

And so this dissertation is perhaps nostalgically irrelevant, a history of losers and their dead landscapes, which, added together, signify exactly nothing.¹³ After all, Thoreau had no disciplined followers to elaborate and disperse the seeds of his thought, and it wasn’t really until the 1960s that he came to be seen as something more than one of Emerson’s minor students.¹⁴ The Adirondack Pioneers, like the Kaweah communards, have been so thoroughly forgotten that their stories, if told at all, are footnotes to longer, more triumphal tales of John Brown and park building, while the ambivalent cultural scions rooted in Adirondack and Sequoian soil—the S.H. Hammonds, J.T. Headleys, Galen Clarks, and Eadweard Muybridges—seem to have been outcompeted by Toyota, which makes a forty-thousand-dollar, fourteen-mile-per-gallon SUV called the Sequoia. A.J. Russell is only ever credited as the Union Pacific’s lackey, and his magnificent *1000 Mile Tree* languishes desperately awaiting our gaze. Maybe our witness trees were all cut down, burned into charcoal, and fed into a hungry blast furnace long ago.

Yet, one doesn’t have to look too hard at the cultural landscape to see the forest—hybrids mixing culture and nature—surrounding. Rachel Carson entitled the second chapter of *Silent*

Spring (1962) “The Obligation to Endure,” and it turns out that a hearty, stubborn endurance and a tenacious love of life, no matter the odds, are the hallmarks of countermodern America. And so even as the Kaweahans were busy renaming their forest trees, a trio of intellectuals, Henry George, Henry Demarest Lloyd, and Edward Bellamy were honing social philosophies with keen environmental edges: “life properly lived,” John L. Thomas wrote of George, “does not use up the forces that maintain life.”¹⁵ Yet, neither George, nor Lloyd, nor Bellamy looks like an environmental critic to our twenty-first century eyes: they were all more interested in preserving the city and the farm than Yosemite; neither were they physical scientists, spokesmen for recognizable environmental organizations, or at work in the halls of Congress. They don’t look much like environmental critics because they were far more interested in culture and society and radical politics than in the narrow environmental niche, and so remain invisible to the four main sets of scholarly spectacles beloved of environmental historians—intellectual notions of wilderness and non-human nature, scientific ecology and its related disciplines, resource use, and mainstream politics.¹⁶

Yet, it is to cultural and social critiques that one must turn to find a continuing legacy of critical and radical landscape visions: in the cities of Lewis Mumford—who wrote in defense of good places, “if our eutopias spring out of the realities of our environment, it will be easy enough to place foundations under them”—or the criticism of Waldo Frank and the beloved community of Van Wyck Brooks, the urban anarchism of Emma Goldman, the reproductive rights of Margaret Sanger, the critiques of industrial agriculture of Carey McWilliams, the human rights advocacy of Cesar Chavez.¹⁷ The activism continues in our contemporary U.S., especially around the fringes in the innovative collectives and small gatherings devoted to remaking society and environment at the same time: the communards, the DIY mechanics converting the junked

Mercedes of the nation's rich to run on used vegetable oil, the appropriate technology folks, the vegetarians and vegans and fruitarians and localvores, those who support community agriculture, the bicycle evangelists, the Occupiers, the tree sitters—like Julia Butterfly Hill, who lived in a 1500-foot-tall redwood for 738 days because she felt that a redwood has a higher purpose than as someone's pool deck...the list stretches on.¹⁸ It can be heard in music, in Woody Guthrie's songs about the Dustbowl, in country twang—the Louvin Brothers' "Great Atomic Power," for instance—in Neil Young's furiously distorted "Keep on Rockin' in the Free World," or Sonic Youth's *Daydream Nation* (1988), in John Coltrane's "Alabama," or Charles Mingus's "Work Song," in the shattering clangor of punk rockers Operation Ivy, Dead Kennedys, or The Casualties, and recently among indie-pop sensations, The Arcade Fire, whose 2010 Album *The Suburbs* culminates (for me) with the haunting lines of their song, "Half Light II (No Celebration)": "Oh, this city's changed so much since I was a little child/Pray to God I won't live to see the death of everything that's wild."¹⁹ It can be seen on film—from Pare Lorentz's *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936) to Wim Wenders's *Paris, Texas* (1984), Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989)—a film in which stifling summer heat is a main character—and in Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (1995). Or one can turn to the photographs of the New Topographics school, Robert Frank's *The Americans*, or Arnold Newman's "Environmental Portraits."

Of course, environmental critique is a green thread running through American letters, and not only in the expected genres: nature writing or the confusing new subcategory, environmental writing. The green light in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) has enchanted us for nearly a century, while E.B. White, not the first author that comes to mind as either an environmental or cultural critic, ends his *Here is New York* (1949), an essay that doggedly refuses to succumb to "the cold menace of human suffering," under the shade of a city tree:

A block or two west of the new City of Man in Turtle Bay there is an old willow tree that presides over an interior garden. It is a battered tree, long suffering and much climbed, held together by strands of wire but beloved of those who know it. In a way it symbolizes the city: life under difficulties, growth against odds, sap-rise in the midst of concrete, and the steady reaching for the sun. Whenever I look at it nowadays, and feel the cold shadow of the plains, I think: "This must be saved, this particular thing, this very tree." If it were to go, all would go—this city, this mischievous and marvelous monument which not to look upon would be like death.²⁰

Cities, death, trees, renewal, landscape, space: the willingness to blend and disrupt too-easy pairings continues to animate American writing to this day: from Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) to David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996)—a novel where O.N.A.N., the Organization of North American Nations, erects giant fans to push toxic gasses toward neighboring nations, while using massive trebuchets to fling its peoples' garbage across national walls. And of course, enchanted forests and magical animals are the staples of tales we read to our children, hoping that a thick mix of culture and landscape will teach them how to lead good lives. We've come a long way from *The Babes in the Woods*, and I bet that many parents nightly turn well-thumbed leaves of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), grieved over the Truffula trees mercilessly logged into extinction by the Once-ler in Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* (1972), or paged through any of the hundreds of lesser-known books set in the woods, in a park, garden, or back yard.

In 1956, Allen Ginsberg's wild *Howl* rent a decade's quiet desperation: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving/hysterical naked," run the famous first lines, but it's another of his poems that I think best captures an always present spirit of American cultural countermodernity.²¹ Entitled "America," it begins:

America I've given you all I have and now I'm nothing.
America two dollars and twentyseven cents January 17, 1956.
I can't stand my own mind,
America when will we end the human war?
Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.

I don't feel good don't bother me.
I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.
America when will you be angelic?²²

It is, above all else, a patriotic poem, and he dares the better angels of our nature to come out from hiding, to make peace. Though he lobbs the writer's ultimate threat—to silence his own pen—in the end, no matter how rotten one's stomach feels, no matter how much beauty and creativity and knowledge America has turned into Mutually Assured Destruction, the world, the wild untamable world, enchants.

The great tidal strength of countermodern culture has always been that it refuses to remain impounded, refuses to puddle around just one political, intellectual, or cultural tradition even in the face of a modernity that has increasingly enforced discrete definition and specialization. In *Nature's Nation*, the language of countermodernity has yet retained an inflection, however slight, of an older sylvan literacy, and if you listen right, you can hear it. Here's Russell Libby, the founder of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association—a farmer and poet and activist who, before he was felled by his twin cancer diagnoses in 2012, ended his poem, “Applied Geometry,” a poem about logging:

and her hands barely reach mine
as we encircle the trunk,
almost eleven feet around.
Back to the lumber tables.
That one tree might make three thousand feet of boards
if our hearts could stand the sound of its fall.²³

We might not consider Libby and Ginsberg and Chavez, The Dead Kennedys and Spike Lee, or, for that matter, the Adirondack pioneers and the Kaweahans environmental critics. Perhaps they aren't, if one insists on a narrow reading of that term, where “environmental” means a scientific interpretation of the material world; but then I've never been certain how much such a narrow reading, one without music or poetry, has to offer. If, however, we can reconceive of

environment in terms of landscape, or even more broadly, space—things fluid enough to let culture in; if we can democratically reconceive of environment as something connecting us all, not merely physically but culturally and ethically; then environment-landscape-space-Nature becomes a constitutive element indivisible from cultural experience, making it possible to find a richly widespread alternative legacy filled with poets and political activists, artists and everyday workers; discontented people everywhere and everywhen emerging from the woodwork to decry the drive towards simplification, hierarchy, financial profit at all costs, all of them green activists rethinking, reshaping where we are in order to find out who we can be.



Figure 85: Mark Ruwedel, “North Yakima and Valley,” 2008.²⁴

Writers sometimes like to say that all writing is autobiographical. If that’s true, then *this* history has been something of an intellectual autobiography, and there’s a piece that you, Dear

Reader, have not yet been privy to. For the last ten years, I've been wrestling with one short paragraph of writing, and I can remember, vividly, when I first encountered it. It was the fall of 2003, and I was teaching history and environmental issues at an alternative high school on the Maine Coast, feeling a bit like an impostor. I was not, am not, an environmentalist, have never felt entirely comfortable with that designation, have always been more interested in cultural radicalism than a movement which first manifested itself to me as suburban, privileged, white, and therapeutic. Yet here I was, teaching environmental issues at a school that included an organic farm and whose mission was to promote environmental awareness.

So I figured that I ought to do a little reading.

On October 18th, I walked into the Gulf of Maine bookstore in Brunswick, Maine and, for \$7.34 bought myself a copy of Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*.

Right in the very beginning, at the end of the Author's Introduction, comes the part that I've been struggling with. "Most of what I write about in this book is already gone or going under fast," Abbey writes:

This is not a travel guide but an elegy. A memorial. You're holding a tombstone in your hands. A bloody rock. Don't drop it on your foot—throw it at something big and glassy. What do you have to lose?²⁵

Those six sentences gave birth to this entire dissertation, and I still feel the bottom drop from my stomach when I read the audacious call to action, the riffing off of Marx and Engels's "nothing to lose but their chains," the despair that alchemically turns into liberation...it's a dare, and one that I've always been afraid to accept. For I am no radical, either. I have radical friends—anarchist homesteaders, and dumpster divers; my wife, Talia, was an active part of the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization protests and West Coast tree sits. But I sit here typing away in

the basement of a glorious building on the campus of a genteel Ivy League university, hoping to earn a PhD and my way into the professional, hopefully tenured, professoriat.

It had been a long time since I last read *Desert Solitaire*: I was afraid that maybe it wouldn't appeal to me the way that it had when I was 23, and, if truth be told, not a little afraid to confront the level gaze of the Author's Introduction, asking me what I had done. But in October of 2010, it was time.

A few months earlier, on August 13th to be exact, Talia was ten weeks pregnant, and we went to her midwife's office, where the midwife pointed some sort of listening contraption at Talia's slightly rounded belly, and, for the first time we heard the heart beat—rapid, vital—of the person who would turn out to be our son, Wyeth. I've had the great good fortune in my life to be immersed in beautiful music, rich conversation, and symphonies of woodland winds, but nothing even remotely compared to the sound of our perfect, healthy baby's heart.

The next day, August 14th, I was diagnosed with testicular cancer, whisked to the operating table, and the abominable life that had taken root in *my* body was cut out—but not entirely, and that's how I found myself back with *Desert Solitaire*, exactly seven years after I had finished it, in the “infusion suite” at the local hospital, watching nurses too-expertly insert IV lines into my chest in preparation for six weeks of intensive chemotherapy during which I lost my hair, and for a while, some of the feeling in my fingertips; I lost months where I should have been supporting Talia, reading up on fatherhood books, preparing the house, dreaming of a future of diapers and laughing and first steps; I lost faith in my own body; I lost my fear of needles, and have scars and weird blotches on my skin left by one of the drugs in my three-drug chemo “cocktail.” My smile feels different, in a way that I can't quite figure out—like there's

pain in back of it, or falseness, or maybe like it comes too quickly—and I’m pretty sure I lost a bit of my wide-eyed wonder. I was 30.

“What do you have to lose,” Abbey asked me over the whirl of the mechanical IV machine as I once again parted the covers of his book.

As I write this, it’s been a year-and-a-half since the last round of chemo mercifully ended, and so far, the cancer is gone. Three-and-a-half more years of frequent blood draws, x-rays, and CT scans, and I’ll be considered cured. The chances that I’ll make it three-and-a-half more years are excellent: better than 97%. But I still think about cancer every day, every time my mind wanders to the recent past, or the future, every time I go for a run, every time I get undressed and find myself confronted by scars and blotches. On the bad days, I lie awake at night, once Talia and Wyeth have gone to bed, acutely aware of the aches that happen to fall anywhere between groin and shoulders—as they almost inevitably must—petrified as the black fear comes gnawing its way back.

One shoe has already dropped, and I wait for the other.

I think of those dying elms back in Fargo.

“What do you have to lose,” asks Abbey, as I lie awake.

There were an estimated 1,529,559 other new cancer cases in 2010. Between 2004 and 2006, the probability that any man, of any age, selected at random in the U.S., had cancer was nearly one in two. Women had a one in three chance.²⁶ And so I am a newly naturalized member of the ever-expanding Kingdom of the Ill, as Susan Sontag—who beat cancer twice, until it overtook her a third and final time—writes in *Illness as Metaphor*. “Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship,” she continues, “although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other

place.”²⁷ Thankfully, the death rates for cancer in the U.S. have been dropping—twenty-five years ago my cancer probably would have been fatal; indeed, my oncologist told me that the tremendous cure rate for testicular cancer is one of the wonders of modern medicine. And that’s something for which I am truly thankful. Yet, even as fewer people die, an increasing number wake up one morning to find a lump where once was smooth skin: cancer rates are on the rise worldwide, particularly in industrialized, modern countries. Sontag warned against using cancer as a metaphor, both because linguistic tricks tend to make cancer shameful for those of us who are given it, and because she was afraid that using cancer as a metaphor would incite violence—we, after all, still speak of the war on cancer, of bombarding our tumors with radiation, of weakened bodily defenses, as if we’ve all been unwillingly drafted into the military’s killing machine. But I think Sontag erred too far on the side of caution, because cancer is more than a metaphor: it is the materialized fantasy of industrial capitalism, caused in large part by the very effluvia of industry itself. It’s an actor—one single cell, initially—seeking to rationally maximize its own benefit, to win at the great race of life by growing endlessly, to think only of its own short-term projections while all the other billions of cells in our body plod along socially, contentedly motivated by mutual aid and commonwealth.²⁸ This is no metaphor, no literary way of saying that nature and human culture are intertwined. Rachel Carson, who died of breast cancer, noted that the dystopian possibilities of nuclear holocaust were only slightly more worrying—and, in retrospect, it turns out, less probable—than the prospect of our environment’s total contamination at the hands of industry.²⁹ Contamination that has increased markedly since Carson’s death. Which means that my son, my beautiful, perfect little boy who has never done anything to anyone, who wants nothing more than to play in his sandbox and eat eggs with salsa

on them and dance to our rockabilly records, he'll have a far greater chance of contracting cancer than his father.

It turns out that competitive capitalism, though it may not be very good at ensuring wealth or equality or justice for anyone at all, is an incredibly democratic scheme for spreading pestilence. A rising tide of filth will sink all of our boats—the yachts and dinghies alike. This is Progress at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in the wealthiest nation in the world.

“What do you have to lose,” asks Abbey as I pore over the statistics of my new, unwanted homeland, worrying for my child.

My cancer has nothing, in the end, to do with me: no history of testicular cancer, no preconditions, nothing save for the fact that I, like all of you, live in a world that is being knowingly poisoned for profit. Indeed, the World Health Organization has estimated that at least 80% of all cancers stem from “environmental” causes—the preferred term letting industry off the hook, and which really means, “industrially-produced toxins.”³⁰ Some carcinogens, like dioxin, like DDT, like benzene, are so prolific that they are thought to inhabit the tissues of every single living person in the U.S. In the mid-1990s, writer and scientist Sandra Steingraber—a bladder cancer survivor—wrote that cancer researchers estimated that somewhere between 3,750 to 7,500 chemicals in daily use were carcinogenic, though because there's far more political and economic will to produce money-making poison than sequester it, only 200 of those suspected carcinogens have been tested and regulated.³¹

As I look fearfully ahead, waiting for the day to come, as statistically it probably will, when my oncologist once again enters the exam room with his carefully wrought stone-faced mask, I find myself surrounded with others, the survivors, the dying, those who have yet to be

diagnosed, and those lucky few whose bodies will remain inviolate even as their friends and families fall ill. We all live in that pregnant pause where the dropped shoe has yet to hit the floor.

I'm sorely tempted to finally accept Abbey's challenge and urge you to throw this book, as hard as you possibly can, against the big and glassy things—the corporate boardrooms where chemicals are bought and sold, the university labs where they're dreamt up, the military bases where they're perfected into death-dealing devices, the political chambers where their toxicity is routinely downplayed in favor of profit. I'm tempted to challenge you to use it to batter the sides of anything and anyone that makes a dollar off of the misery of living things, to flatten any hierarchy that keeps you from living a healthy, fulfilling life.

But, I can't. Violence is their game, not mine, and I refuse to live, or raise my son, or share my book with you, in a world of broken glass and shattered concrete, in deconstructed rubble, only.

Abbey asks us to imagine *Desert Solitaire* as a tombstone, but I've had enough of death and inanimate things. And it's exactly here, on the thin frontier between hope and despair, that I finally understand this ghost who has been whispering in my ear. After all, no one writes a book, a book about beauty, a book whose sylvan epigraph ends, "Love flowers best in openness and freedom," no nihilist writes a book like this.³² I think I finally discovered what Abbey was urging as I sat in the chemo ward trying not to fixate on the distended bags of chemicals, with their warnings of hazardous material, dripping in to my damaged body.

For this, I truly give thanks.

I'm alive. And this dissertation is no memorial to the dead, no vengeful battering ram. It's green, it's living, it's an enchanted talking tree, a witness tree, a thing under whose leaves we can all gather, like Thoreau advises us, "as *eupeptics* to congratulate each other on the ever glorious

morning,” a place of laughter and friendship and music and poetry, our own balsam-scented utopia, just one of the many places where, as we wait for the doctor’s final report, we create and live in a world of our own choosing.³³

What do we have to lose?

NOTES TO FORWARD

¹ John Prine, "Paradise." *Great Days: The John Prine Anthology*, Rhino Records, 1993.

² *The Old Elm and Other Elms* (Boston: A. Williams & Co., 1877) 2; "Read and Run," *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture* 35, no. 21 (Feb. 19, 1876), 2.

³ John Bonner, *The Town of Boston in New England* (Boston: Fra. Dewing, 1722).

⁴ As many scholars have pointed out, the term "modern" is a powerful way of establishing worth: it *always* implies a value judgment. By terming something "modern," we note that it has characteristics that are similar to those we find in our contemporary world, and the default assumption is that the modern world tends to look an awful lot like the industrialized—I almost wrote "modernized"—West. There's an implicit imperative in this position, that we study things that are modern because they can tell us things about our own world, while the premodern seems safely buried beneath the sands of time. There's a further implication that interesting things might have happened in premodern times and places, but they aren't really relevant anymore. I want to expand on Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to "write into the history of modernity the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies that attend it" by seeing not just declension, but possibility and agency, as well. Modernity in the U.S. is not one single thing, but hotly contested, always emerging, characterized as much by contingency, hope, enchantment, and radical dissent as by manifest destiny, imperialism, disenchantment, and the culture of capitalism. If it's inaccurate to posit modernity as one single process, led by the West, a standard to which the rest of the world is held, then it's also too simple to imagine that modernity, even in the West, is one coherent, uncontested whole.

Of course, branding eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century America "modern" doesn't square with the most common way of periodizing U.S. history. It's much more standard to attribute the birth of American modernity as occurring after the Civil War—and often after the "official" end of Reconstruction in 1877. "The war did not make America modern, but the war marks the birth of modern America," writes Louis Menand in his brilliant *The Metaphysical Club*. T.J. Jackson Lears would agree, at least implicitly: *No Place of Grace* is entirely concerned with post-Reconstruction America, as is his recent *Rebirth of a Nation*; and Alan Trachtenberg's *The Incorporation of America* sees the post-Appomattox US as "a changed, more tightly structured society with new hierarchies of control, and also changed conceptions of...society, of America itself." I bring this up not because I think any of the above authors' analyses are fatally flawed—indeed, every one of these works resides on my top shelf, these-are-why-I-want-to-be-a-scholar section of books, and their influence thrums its way throughout the following chapters—but because, as will become clear, I think reading a kind of American modernity back into the early nineteenth and even into the eighteenth century can yield a whole crop of fruitful insights—not least of which is to begin to see post-Civil War America as every bit as full of contention, dissent, and possibility, as *unincorporated*, as its ancestor.

Indeed, there's a whole scholarly tradition of dating the start of western modernity back as far as the sixteenth century. "'Modern' begins to appear as a term more or less synonymous with 'now' in the late sixteenth century," writes Raymond Williams, and was used with increasingly frequency, and complexity, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Stephen Greenblatt has traced the rise of modernity to the rediscovery of Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things* in the fifteenth century. And Foucault has traced the attitude of modernity in the west to Kant's 1784 piece *An Answer to the Question, What is Enlightenment?*, which is not so much a founding statement of the modern, but an eloquent indication of it. European historians group themselves into early modern, and late modern, and scholars such as James Scott speak of a "high modernity" more or less contemporary with late nineteenth and twentieth century industrial development. Given all of this, why not read eighteenth-century America as modern? See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); the recent AHR Roundtable, "Historians and the Question of 'Modernity,'" *The American Historical Review*, 116, 3 (June, 2011): 631-751; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 45; Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001) ix; T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981) and *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture & Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 3-4; Lewis Perry, *Boats Against the Current: American Culture between Revolution and Modernity, 1820-1860* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993) 8-9, and

especially Part V, "Modernity," 215-263; Raymond Williams, "When Was Modernism," in *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1989) 31 and *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 208-209; Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011); Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, Paul Rabinow and Nikola Rose, eds. (New York: The New Press, 2003).

⁵ *Memorial of Jesse Lee and the Old Elm: Eighty-Fifth Anniversary of Jesse Lee's Sermon Under the Old Elm, Boston Common, Held Sunday Evening, July 11, 1875, With a Historical Sketch of the Great Tree* (Boston: James P. Magee, 1875) 11.

⁶ "To the Old Elm Tree in the Centre of Boston Common," *Boston Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 1 (June, 1826) 53.

⁷ In this way, Jean M. O'Brien's notion of "firsting and lasting"—or the ways in which New Englanders convinced themselves that the tropes of the First White Man and the Last Indian were not only true, but natural progressions in the great drama of world history, despite abundant everyday evidence to the contrary—can be seen to extend to trees. In fact, the first pioneer was, as often as not, a tree. See Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

⁸ *Appeal of the Old Elm on Boston Common* (Boston: 1860) American Antiquarian Society Broadside, BDSDS.1860 5. Published in the *Boston Daily Journal* April 30th, 1860.

⁹ Modernity is an imprecise term, both adjective and noun. It can mean nearly anything: from technological artifacts to socio-economic systems; enlightened ways of thinking; artistic movements that either are resistant to, accommodating of, or nihilistically oblivious to the whole of modern society; the formation of nations and modern government; and much more besides. Or it can simply mean "current." We can use it in a complimentary fashion, or give it a pejorative connotation. Gallons of ink have been spilt trying to define what modernity is, how it differs from pre and post-modernity. It's made for hours of fascinating reading, some of which I'll cite here and throughout the dissertation. It's not, however, my object to enter into the debates surrounding definitions, and for my work I've relied heavily on the way that David Harvey, Anthony Giddens, and Lewis Perry have characterized the term. All three have convinced me that modernity can be conceived as having two seemingly opposing poles: "the conjoining of the ephemeral and the fleeting with the eternal and immutable," as Harvey has put it. For Perry, these poles are best personified by Andrew Jackson—the archetypal self-made man who, it seemed, could be nearly anything he chose—and Ralph Waldo Emerson—who embraced change as long as it was grounded in the unchanging bedrock of classical virtues such as self-reliance. Many of the proponents of this new world, from Jackson and Emerson on down to today's cheerleaders for Progress, clothed their work in a sort of joyous confidence, but beneath the facade of optimism was a deforming fear—the fear that change was directionless, disorienting (if everyone is a self-made man, if everyone is only who he says he is, than how can we ever know anything about anybody for sure?)—a fear best captured in Melville's *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade* (1857). Modernity, whatever its connotation, does imply progress, a break with the dark past, and can be characterized as an accelerated pace and scope of change, as Giddens points out. But here's what's crucial: modernity has *never* been an unambiguously clear concept, and it, too, has a history, as Harvey, Giddens, and Perry have so carefully sketched out, a history that is marked by the way various people have used and interpreted the term, how much weight they've put on ephemerality or the eternal. It's a contentious history filled with dissent and ongoing negotiation: "The tensions between internationalism and nationalism, between globalism and parochialist ethnocentrism, between universalism and class privileges, were never far from the surface. Modernism at its best tried to confront the tensions, but at its worst either swept them under the rug or exploited them...for cynical, political advantage," writes Harvey. In the United States, it's certainly true that one side of modernity was smugly Whiggish, as Perry argues: "It was confident of the powers of education and intellect and looked forward to continuous social improvement as the great benefit of democracy." But as Perry goes on to write, there were a number of potentially powerful ways that modernity allowed for radical new possibilities: "Let me emphasize one positive result of the confusion and drift that I have been outlining: it opened the way for middle-class men to empathize with those who were previously off-stage in Western history. The splitting of selves could take the form of projection into another's place." This is perhaps akin to the utopian realism that Giddens calls for. These aren't small things. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990) 10, 24-25 27-35; Perry, *Boats Against the Current*, 5-10, 206-208, 215, 239, Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) 6, 154-158.

¹⁰ Matthew Potteiger and James Purinton, in their *Landscape Narratives*, a work that has deeply influenced my own, argue that spatial landscape narratives can only infrequently be understood as having one coherent author, and that

seeking to uncover authorial intent is the wrong tack when seeking to navigate the waters of landscape history. Rather, the landscape presents itself as a text with a broad spectrum of meanings. For those of us who seek to recover a cultural history of landscape, then, we must focus less on material, empirical proof and much more on interpretation, on the practices of everyday life, to borrow a phrase from Michel de Certeau. And so something like a sylvan literacy—whose inflections, dialects, idiomatic phrases, and allusions will vary widely from social group to social group, or even from individual to individual—becomes a useful way to explore landscape history. Indeed, Potteiger and Purinton outline a whole set of tropes, including metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, which we might use to uncover landscape narratives. See Matthew Potteiger and Jamie Purinton, *Landscape Narratives: Design Practices for Telling Stories* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998) 10, 17, 19, 34, *passim*.

¹¹ A.J. Downing, *The Fruits and Fruit Trees of America; or The Culture, Propagation, and Management, in the Garden and Orchard, of Fruit Trees Generally; with Descriptions of all the Finest Varieties of Fruit, Native and Foreign, Cultivated in This Country* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1847) 56.

¹² A. Saul & Co. *Periodical Catalogue of Fruit and Ornamental Trees and Plants Cultivated at the Highland Nurseries, Newburgh, Near New York* (Newburgh: Wm. L. Allison, 1854) 16.

¹³ Henry David Thoreau, Thoreau, *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*, Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen, eds. 14 vols. bound as 2. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1962) 1: 358-359.

¹⁴ Because of this fact, it's surprising that there is very little that has been done on the cultural uses of American woodlands. Relevant works include Michael Williams's *Americans & Their Forests: A Historical Geography*, a very detailed resource use survey; Thomas R. Cox et al., *This Well-Wooded Land: Americans and Their Forests from Colonial Times to the Present*, an encyclopedic account of the rise of modern American forestry; the first part of Simon Schama's wonderful *Landscape & Memory*, "The Wood" (Chapter 4, "The Verdant Cross" is especially relevant for American cultural history); Lori Vermaas's *Sequoia: The Heralded Tree in American Art and Culture*, a thoroughly researched, in-depth exploration of the role one species has played in the formation of a dominant American national identity; Thomas J. Campanella's *Republic of Shade: New England and the American Elm*, like *Sequoia*, a deeply researched history of a single species and its place, in this instance, in the New England imagination; and Eric Rutkow's *American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation*, a forest-products-meets-the-Great-Men-of-conservation triumphal survey of American history. Perhaps the closest thing approaching a comprehensive, synthetic cultural history of America and its trees is Donald Culross Peattie's *A Natural History of North American Trees*. It's a field guide both to individual species but also their deep cultural uses, as well as a love story to the out-of-doors, all rolled into one. Robert Pogue Harrison's *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, a cultural history of the idea of the forest in the Western imagination from antiquity to the present, in some ways is the closest to what I'm trying to do here, though he's much more concerned with high culture than I. See Michael Williams, *Americans & Their Forests: A Historical Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Thomas R. Cox, Robert S. Maxwell, Phillip Drennon Thomas, and Joseph J. Malone, *This Well-Wooded Land: Americans and Their Forests from Colonial Times to the Present* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1985); Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Lori Vermaas, *Sequoia: The Heralded Tree in American Art and Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003); Thomas J. Campanella, *Republic of Shade: New England and the American Elm* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Eric Rutkow, *American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Scribner, 2012); Donald Culross Peattie, *A Natural History of North American Trees* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007); Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁵ D.J. Browne, *The Trees of America; Native and Foreign, Pictorially and Botanically Delineated and Scientifically and Popularly Described*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1846) 504.

¹⁶ Thomas J. Campanella, *Republic of Shade: New England and the American Elm* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 25-26.

¹⁷ Thoreau, *Journal*, 1:214.

¹⁸ The Author of *John Hardy the Footman, The Old Oak Tree* (Boston: G.W. Cottrell, n.d. [1848-1855?]).

¹⁹ Uncle Philip, *The American Forest; or, Uncle Philip's Conversations with the Children about the Trees of America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845) 204.

²⁰ Thomas W. Higgins, *The Crooked Elm; or, Life By the Wayside* (Boston: Whittemore, Niles, and Hall, 1857); Mary Hinckley, *Voice from the Forest; or, An Appeal from Nature in Behalf of the Temperance Cause* (Lowell: Jams P. Walker, 1852); T.S. Arthur, *Ten Nights in a Barroom, and What I Saw There* (Boston: L.P. Crown & Co., 1854).

²¹ Nathaniel Currier, *The Tree of Intemperance* (New York: N. Currier, 1849).

²² An example of the sorts of things alluding to the Tree of Life: a huge lithograph from 1835 called *Gospel Tree*. Each root, each section of trunk, and each of the hundreds of branches and leaves contains a Bible verse, all numbered sequentially so that one can read the *Gospel Tree* as a single coherent narrative. In 1844, Miss R. Parker's *The Tree of Life* had this to say about the comeuppance of a sinner: "His shrieks!—/Oh, how dismal!/ 'Tis despair that's unearthly./He is dying—alas!/Yet can never expire./Divested of clay,/Yet keen anguish augmenting,/He now is enwrap'd amid 'eternal fire.'" A few years later, Kelloggs & Thayer printed a lithograph also entitled *The Tree of Life*, showing a brothel, public drunkenness, usurers, "fancy women," sailors, and the "Babylon Mother of Harlots," all shut out from a heavenly city. In the middle of this city sprouts a giant apple tree, like the *Gospel Tree* in the shape of a cross, to which Christ has been nailed. It's important that in the two lithographs, the Trees are invariably straight trunked, clean limbed, perfect examples of the arboreal form. See D.W. Kellogg & Co., *Gospel Tree* (Westfield, MA: Phelps & Holcomb, 1835); Miss R. Parker, *The Tree of Life: Containing Moral & Religious Subjects, Calculated to Benefit & Interest* (Lowell: n.p., 1844) 5; *The Tree of Life* (New York: Keloggs & Thayer, n.d. [1846?]).

²³ Moses Ingalls, *The Tree That Would Always Live; or, An Illustration of the Soul and of the Scriptures as the Words or Instruction of God to Men* (New York: S. W. Benedict, 1833) 25.

²⁴ *The Barren Fig Tree* (New York: American Tract Society, n.d. [1838?]).

²⁵ Mahlon Day, *Book of Trees* (New York: Mahlon Day, 1837) 4.

²⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature in The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Mary Oliver, ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 2000) 6-7.

²⁷ Though I have been left underwhelmed by Bruno Latour's archaeology of modernity—I can't shake the feeling that "The Modern Constitution" of his devising, which is a useful heuristic, become increasingly ossified as *We Have Never Been Modern* continues, that his conceptual model starts to come alive and stand in for the messy complexity of the real world, that *We Have Never Been Modern* ends up overly rationalized and simplified—I nonetheless find his discussion of hybridity, of the rich mixes of nature and culture that have paradoxically proliferated in the modern world, and his imperative that we all consider non-humans as equally worthy of attention and, perhaps, ethical standing, quite useful. "Nature and Society," he writes, "are not two distinct poles, but one and the same production of successive states of societies-natures of collectives." Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Catherine Porter, trans., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) 3, 12, 34, 38, 81, 95, 104, 136, 137, 139, 144.

²⁸ *The Annualette. A Christmas and New Year's Gift for Children* (Boston: William Crosby & Co., 1842).

²⁹ *Lessons from An Apple Tree: A Gift from the Teachers and Children of the Warren Street Chapel, Boston* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth's Print, 1848) 5-8.

³⁰ Emerson, *Nature*, 3, 7-8, 39.

³¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Ode, Inscribed to W.H. Channing," in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Mary Oliver, ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 2000) 693-695; Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 431-432.

³² The relevant historiography is far too lengthy for me to comprehensively cite here. There are obviously very strong analytical reasons to see the Civil War as the end of an era and the beginning of something new, and in many ways it was. I am not taking issue with the periodization, but pointing out that *all* periodizations, mine included, emphasize certain things at the cost of others. In many ways this ties in to the point about the benefits of continuity, of reading modernity back into the past that I elaborated on earlier. For now, I hope, it will be enough to point out a few relevant, broadly synthetic sources. See, for instance, Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976); Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1985); William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991); Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New America Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999); Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures With Nature in Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1841* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); David S. Reynolds, *Waking Giant: America in the Age of Jackson* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008) and Reynolds, *Walt*

Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography (New York: Vintage Books, 1996); Lears, *No Place of Grace*; and Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*.

³³ The notion of cultural hegemony that I'm working with here and throughout the dissertation comes from T.J. Jackson Lears, who, in turn, bases his understanding on his reading of Antonio Gramsci, the early twentieth-century Italian Marxist. Lears explains that hegemony is not the same thing as domination: domination involves the ability of a powerful elite to force its agenda upon everyone else, whether through threat of violence, monopolization of the cultural means of production, or any other method. It's a top down, fairly simplistic way of influencing culture. Hegemony, on the other hand, is much more subtle, much more entangling, in that it actively depends on the consent of the dominated group. Here's a real-world example that may make it clear: the phenomenon of environmentally committed people who nevertheless drive SUVs or big pickup trucks—or in Al Gore's case, live in mansions. Indeed, for years I drove a full-sized pickup—nineteen miles per gallon of gas on the highway!—and my justification, as it often is with many others who purport to be green, was that I moved around a lot, I needed room for my bikes, skis, and hiking gear, and it had 4 wheel drive, which helped in the snow and rough back roads. I also worked at various construction jobs, and would haul a cement mixer just frequently enough to allay my conscience. We could use Lears to point to the hegemony of large-car culture in America, not to show that every American actually drives a whale, or that every American blindly agrees that bigger is better, but that, even amongst those of us who critique car culture, there's a huge streak of complicity. A less obvious, and perhaps more tellingly hegemonic example is the hybrid car: sure, hybrid engines are better than conventional ones, but a world in which everyone drove hybrids would still be a world threatened by global climate change. Hegemony means that what we say and what we do don't always line up, and that saying comes to be a stand in for doing. In other words, we excuse ourselves while wagging our finger at others. Whereas domination is an autocratic system, the great power of hegemony is precisely that it allows for the possibility of dissent, it's more democratic: it's flexible, it asks very little, really, so long as we meet the very minimum of conformity. The hegemony of capitalism can allow for critique, some of it quite strident, as long as profits continue to be made.

And though Lears's deployment of hegemony works very well for the upper-class cultural elite that he focuses on in *No Place of Grace*, there's a double danger lurking in simplistically applying *No Place of Grace* indiscriminately. Perhaps you, dear reader, have started to wrinkle your nose at the whiff of it that emerges from this footnote: it's awfully easy for us cultural critics to smugly point out how others naively missed the point, and to excuse ourselves. In other words, sometimes we fail to recognize our own accommodation. The power of hegemony lies in its ability to be internalized and then reproduced, and it baits a trap especially for the cultural critic to see hegemony as always already in command. Too often, hegemony is theorized in such a way as to make it tautological: it's the *a priori* state of things, the tune to which historical actors must dance. When we fall into such a trap, when we argue, in effect, that hegemony always triumphs because of its flexibility, I am convinced that we fall prey to a reactionary political nihilism, that we in fact implicitly argue for doing nothing and thus only guarantee the extension of whatever it is we are critiquing. If hegemony implies consent, as Lears argues, and I'd agree, then it also very explicitly presupposes resistance. And so I'd like to build from Lears, but instead of seeing capitalistic culture as hegemonic, as "an unintended consequence of sincere (though often self-deceiving) efforts to impose moral meaning on a rapidly changing social world," I'd like to take those sincere critics on their own terms, and, without letting them off the critical hook, try to understand their dissident cultural visions not as self-deception, but as serious alternatives.

James C. Scott offers a powerful critique of hegemony in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, but unlike Lears, who focuses on bourgeoisie culture and accommodation, Scott is concerned with subaltern populations. Nonetheless, he directly rebuts Lears's sense of hegemony and false consciousness, instead pointing out that "'Falsely conscious' subjects are quite capable, it seems, of taking revolutionary action... The problem with the hegemonic thesis, at least in its strong forms as proposed by some of Gramsci's successors, is that it is difficult to explain how social change could ever originate from below." This is the second danger that theories of hegemony can present. Obviously, I'm not going to solve the theoretical riddle of hegemony in a footnote—even one as long as this. But I would like to point out that what Lears gives us is a powerful lens for understanding why things remain the same, while Scott helps us understand why things change. And yet, there's a way in which they're not so different, in the long view: each thinker, taken at a distance, argues that our actions and the way we think about the world, matter very deeply. Whereas a thinker like Foucault tends to discount the possibility of human agency, both Lears and Scott ask us to consider the role of the individual. See T.J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (June, 1985): 567-593; Lears, *No*

Place of Grace, 10; Williams, *Keywords*, 144-246; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) 78, 77-90.

³⁴ Leo Marx, in one of the brilliant, short little articles that I have come to think of as characteristic of his scholarship, points out that the very notion of “progress” was undergoing a radical shift over the course of the nineteenth century. It had originally meant a process of political, social, and individual betterment, something more metaphysical than what it turned into: a fairly simple description of wealth and technological significance. Originally, it was a term more concerned with process, with means, rather than ends. There was also a longer European tradition of questioning imperialism and the take-no-prisoners acquisition of wealth, as Sankar Muthu explores in his high intellectual history, *Enlightenment Against Empire*. Leo Marx, “Does Improved Technology Mean Progress?” *Technology Review* 90 (Jan. 1987): 33, 71; Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

³⁵ Mary G. Morrison, “The Victims,” in *The Old Elm and Other Elms* (Boston: A. Williams & Co., 1877) 18-19.

³⁶ David Foster Wallace Lives!

³⁷ There are many witness trees whose marks have guided me on this journey. For now, I’ll limit myself to those works of nonfictional American history. See, for instance, Lee Clark Mitchell, *Witnesses to a Vanishing America: The Nineteenth-Century Response* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); John Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); John L. Thomas, *Alternative America: Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Adversary Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); R. Lawrence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, & Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Greg Sarris, *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Foundation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Robert L. Dorman, *A Word for Nature: Four Pioneering Environmental Advocates, 1845-1913* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Rebecca Solnit, *Savage Dreams: A Journey Into the Landscape Wars of the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Louis P. Masur, *1831: The Year of Eclipse* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); David Nye, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003); Schama, *Landscape & Memory*; Stephanie LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies: Territorial Fictions of the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Aaron Sachs, *The Humboldt Current: Nineteenth-Century Exploration and the Roots of American Environmentalism* (New York: Viking, 2006); Anne Baker, *Heartless Immensity: Literature, Culture, and Geography in Antebellum America* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006); Jack Temple Kirby, *Mockingbird Song: Ecological Landscapes of the South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

³⁸ Emily Dickinson, “41” in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Thomas H. Johnson, ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960) 24.

³⁹ As Latour points out, assigning the non-human world extraordinary powers of testimony is at the root of modernity—in fact, it’s at the root of science. Humans are always error-prone, and so we invent things that we endow with omnipotent, perfect, total recall. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 23.

⁴⁰ As Max Oelschlaeger, Latour, and many others have noted, the intellectual key to the birth of modernity is the birth of the Cartesian dualism (and perhaps the notion of dualism itself) that separates everything into one of two camps: human mind, or stupid matter. From this dualism come the modern pursuits—science, philosophy, ethics, economics, history—that have shaped the entire world since the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. Very often, the modern metaphor for How Things Work is mechanic—god as a watchmaker, society driven by engines, ecological science as a series of cybernetic feedback loops, economics as a system of inputs and outputs—implying that everything has its place, is knowable, and thus controllable, by human reason. One of the great accomplishments of modernity has been to demystify, to partially disenchant the world, to turn living matter into inanimate material, stuff ready for human appropriation. But there’s another tradition, one that modernity has never regulated into submission: the organic tradition, with its ruling metaphors of roots, mothers, and a nature that is sentient, has intention. A tradition of an enchanted world. Oelschlaeger’s history is awfully schematic and lacks nuance in many important ways, and yet his unwinding of specific intellectual traditions is crucially important for thinking through the problems of modernity (which Oelschlaeger, whose exploration of modernity as a cultural phenomena is limited, unfortunately calls “Modernism”) and nature. Donald Worster’s *Nature’s Economy* is a very good history of the contested concept of ecology, and of the cultural metaphors that we use to make scientific sense

of our world. And though he would probably kick in protest to be lumped in anywhere with anyone, especially in a footnote, Murray Bookchin's overview of the emergence of hierarchy and his theorization of a new social system that recognizes the unity in diversity in *all* living things is, like Oelschlaeger, an extremely incisive exposé and critique of modernity—even if it is terrible history. See Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), especially chapters two, "The Alchemy of Modernism: The Transmutation of Wilderness into Nature," 68-96 and three, "Wild Nature: Critical Responses to Modernism," 97-132; Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Oakland: AK Press, 2005). For a thought-provoking exploration of how modern life has refused to remain disenchanted, how we can cultivate enchantment, and the ethical imperative to avoid the fashionable, skeptical post-modern pose of ironic disavowal, see Jane Bennett's *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁴¹ Thoreau, *Journals* 1: 62, 63, 70, 95.

⁴² Of course, I'm paraphrasing rather broadly from Lears's *No Place of Grace*. His definition of anti-modernity is remarkable for its breadth and flexibility, and his acknowledgement that the anti-modern impulse was a multivalent, impossible to completely define sentiment. Lears's notion of anti-modernity has become quite influential, though it does seem that, when adopted by others, it has lost some of the nuance that Lears originally intended. Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 5-7.

⁴³ In this way, the countermoderns that I discuss in this dissertation are quite different from the critics that Raymond Williams dissects in *The Country and the City*, those who would idealize the rural past "based on a temporary situation and on a deep desire for stability, [which] served to cover and to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time." It's not so much that my historical characters were super-rational clairvoyants who could see every implication of their landscape visions—they weren't and they couldn't—but that in every case they sought to highlight and force into the light of day some of the bitter contradictions of their time. They were all people who would agree with Williams's eloquent call to arms: "The song of the land, the song of rural labour, the song of delight in the many forms of life with which we all share our physical world, is too important and too moving to be tamely given up, in an embittered betrayal, to the confident enemies of all significant and actual independence and renewal." This is precisely Thoreau's point. Instead, my countermoderns are part of what Murray Bookchin has called "a legacy of freedom": "Cutting across the very legacy of domination is another: the legacy of freedom that lives in the daydreams of humanity in the great ideals and movements—rebellious, anarchic, Dionysian—that have welled up in all great eras of social transition." Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 45, 271; Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 108.

⁴⁴ Of course, "countermodern" is a contested term as well (Jennifer Price, in her otherwise wonderful *Flight Maps* uses it as a sort of simplified Lears-esque antimodernity), and I use it not to drive home an artificial typology in which some things can be classified antimodern, some countermodern, some just plain modern, and some high-modern, but to avoid the connotation of rejection, of a flight from the "bitter contradictions of the time," and instead highlight the active engagement with which many nineteenth-century Americans engaged their world. My use of the term originally comes from Foucault's off-handed remark that he would like to "try to find out how the attitude of modernity, ever since its formation, has found itself struggling with attitudes of 'countermodernity,'" a formulation that highlights resistance and carves out a significant space for alternative imagination. I'd like to reverse his equation, to focus on the attitudes of countermodernity, their flexibility, their longstanding existence. My thinking has also been influenced by what Homi K. Bhabha has called "contra-modernity":

Postcoloniality...is a salutary reminder of the persistent 'neo-colonial' relations within the 'new' world order and the multinational division of labour. Such a perspective enables the authentication of histories of exploitation and the evolution of strategies of resistance. Beyond this, however, postcolonial critique bears witness to those countries and communities—in the North and South, urban and rural—constituted, if I may coin a phrase, 'otherwise than modernity.' Such cultures of a postcolonial *contra-modernity* may be contingent to modernity, discontinuous or in contention with it, resistant to its oppressive, assimilationist technologies; but they also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to 'translate,' and therefore reinscribe the social imagery of both metropolis and modernity.

Obviously, there are great differences between Bhabha's subject and mine, and one might criticize the implications of grafting a Bhabha-esque postcolonialism onto a history of the United States that, in many ways, focuses on those who are the traditional targets of postcolonial critics. But what I find so powerful in the thinking of Bhabha and many other postcolonial thinkers is their ability to find diversity and resistance where traditionally historians have

seen nothing but an undifferentiated, premodern, irrational mob. And rather than theorizing “the West” or “the metropolis” or “science” or “the Enlightenment” as some static, internally coherent entity, postcolonial lenses can be tuned to show us a messy human agency and process of negotiation, used to explode the notion of monolithic cultural movements everywhere, all in the service of highlighting individual power and responsibility. In the end, there’s the potential for something politically liberating in this, I think, something that shows us that our everyday actions matter.

And so, much of my working method derives from a mixture of Michel de Certeau and James C. Scott, and what I take to be their combined emphasis on individual action, on use, on how the practices of everyday life—Scott prefers the term “*mētis*,”—when read carefully, can show all sorts of negotiation, resistance, and outright dissent. Price, *Flight Maps*, 109, 123, 138, 237; Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?,” 48; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture. With a New preface by the Author* (New York: Routledge Classics, 1994) 9; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Steven Rendall, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, especially “Part 4: The Missing Link,” 309-357 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* 17, 34, and especially chapter 5, “Making Social Space for a Dissident Subculture,” 108-135.

⁴⁵ Throughout this dissertation, I focus on “landscape” and “space,” rather than “environment” and “nature.” A great deal of writing has gone into trying to define what “landscape” and “space” are, but almost all of it agrees that both terms highlight intermixtures of the human and non-human worlds. As J.B. Jackson put it with his characteristic eloquent terseness, “landscape is...above all a space shared by a group of people.” There are exceptions, of course—notably William Cronon, who has used landscape to denote what most people mean by the word “wilderness”; nevertheless, the broadness of both terms, “landscape” and “space,” as well as the history of the term “landscape” (attributed to either 16th and 17th-century Dutch painters, or rooted in Anglo-Saxon dialect, and connoting anti-aristocratic pieces of land, in contradistinction to the forest, which was the exclusive hunting domain of the aristocracy) highlights the perpetual fluidity, the openness and possibility, and the ever evolving productive interaction of nature and culture. Whereas “environment” and “nature” both tend to have a normative connotation of places where humans are not, “landscape” and “space” are unapologetically promiscuous.

In this way Henry Lefebvre and David Harvey become useful for helping me rethink a countermodern nineteenth-century spatial imagination. Lefebvre’s observations about social space as a product, his injunction that we must focus on the always-occurring process of its creation, and his argument that “a revolution that does not produce a new social space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses,” provides much of the backbone for this dissertation. Likewise, Harvey’s contention that the world is literally a-boil with anti-capitalist sentiment, and that spaces of hope abound if only we know how to see them, informs much of my work. (“Ask first: where is anti-capitalist struggle to be found? The answer is everywhere...the interstices of uneven geographical development hide a veritable ferment of opposition.”) Again, I realize that both Lefebvre and Harvey base their analysis in very rigorous readings of Marx, something that I don’t do in this dissertation. Nevertheless, I do think that the way I use Lefebvre and Harvey is in keeping with the spirit, if not the letter, of their work. Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 56; J.B. Jackson, “Concluding with Landscapes,” and “The Word Itself” in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 5, 149; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991) 54, 30-65; David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 71;

⁴⁶ John H. Hewitt, *The Old Elm Tree* (Baltimore: G. Willing, Jr., 1842).

⁴⁷ John Brinckerhoff Jackson, “In Favor of Trees,” in *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 95-102, is a wonderful meditation on the role trees have played in US culture. In a similar vein, D.W. Meinig’s “The Beholding Eye,” is not only one of the inspirations for this dissertation, but a powerfully suggestive investigation of how landscapes and culture are intertwined: “landscapes mirror and landscapes matter...they tell us much about the values we hold and at the same time affect the quality of the lives we lead.” D.W. Meinig, “The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene,” in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, D.W. Meinig, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) 46.

NOTES TO PART 1

¹ Robert Frost, *A Witness Tree* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1942).

² Peattie, *A Natural History of North American Trees*, 102-104; information on the river’s current comes from Henry David Thoreau, *Plan of Concord River from East Sudbury to Billerica Mills, 22.15 Miles, To be used on a trial in*

the S.J. Court, Sudbury & East Sudbury Meadow Corporation vs. Middlesex Canal, Taken by agreement of Parties, by L. Baldwin, Civil Engineer. Surveyed & Drawn by B.F. Perham. May, 1834. N.D. [1860?], Henry David Thoreau Surveys. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library. Hereafter referred to as Thoreau, River Survey.

³ Thoreau, *Journal*, 1: 268; 2: 1464. Music is a constant theme in Thoreau's *Journals*, and one gets the sense that Thoreau was treated to the wind's symphony – one free to anybody who cared to listen – nearly everywhere he went, in every weather, and in every season. A quick note on Thoreau's *Journal*: I've consulted three different versions for this project. The first, and the one I'll use most often, is the Torrey and Allen 1962 edition, which I cite in this note. To date, this version of Thoreau's *Journal* is the most complete (Elizabeth Hall Witherell is currently directing the reediting and publication, for Princeton University Press, of an entirely new edition of Thoreau's works, including the *Journal*; but as of this date (April, 2010), publication has only made it as far as the journals for 1854). However, there are some major omissions from the Torrey and Allen version, including, most notably for my project, the expurgation of most of Thoreau's entries relating to his Concord River survey of June-August, 1859. To fill this gap, I've consulted two additional *Journal* versions: the original, located at The Morgan Library and Witherell's on-line transcriptions of The Morgan Library's holdings. In the citations that follow, it will be clear to which version I am referring.

⁴ Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*: Autograph Manuscript, April 8, 1859-September 21, 1859, MS. MA 1302.35. The Morgan Library and Museum, front page (hereafter referred to as Thoreau, *Journal*, Morgan). There are no page numbers in Thoreau's manuscript journals. Where applicable, I'll note under which date my citation falls.

⁵ Until very recently, Thoreau's surveying activities were seen as quaint, at best, and a distraction from his real work—writing—at worst. Albert F. McLean, Jr., "Thoreau's True Meridian: Natural Fact and Metaphor," *American Quarterly* 20, 3. (Autumn, 1968): 567-579, is one of the few classic texts that tries to consider Thoreau's surveys as a worth-while effort. Thankfully, recent scholars have begun to pay more attention to Thoreau's maps. See Rick Van Noy, *Surveying the Interior: Literary Cartographers and the Sense of Place* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2003), especially chapter 2, "Surveying the Strange: Henry David Thoreau's Intelligence of Place," 38-72; Leslie Perrin Wilson, curator at the Concord Free Public Library and an incredibly generous scholar of all things Concord, has also published a short call to arms arguing that more attention ought to be paid to Thoreau's surveys. Leslie Perrin Wilson, "Thoreau's Manuscript Surveys: Getting Beyond the Surface," *The Concord Saunterer* n.s. 15 (2007): 24-35. John Hessler's, "From Ortelius to Champlain: The Lost Maps of Henry David Thoreau," *The Concord Saunterer* n.s. 18 (2010): 1-26 is a cartographic history that traces some of Thoreau's extracurricular mapmaking efforts. Patrick Chura is the dean of Thoreau the Surveyor, and his "Economic and Environmental Perspectives in the Surveying 'Field Notes' of Henry David Thoreau," *The Concord Saunterer: A Journal of Thoreau Studies* n.s. 15 (2007): 36-63, is a must read. And his very recent *Thoreau the Land Surveyor* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), is a text that richly probes Thoreau's surveying activities throughout his life. Indeed, Chura is specially positioned to write such a book: the son of a surveyor who spent his summers helping his father draw boundaries, Chura brings the personal, tactile knowledge of surveying to his book. Finally, Sarah Luria's "Thoreau's Geopoetics," in *Geohumanities: Art, History, Text at the Edge of Place*, Michael Dear, Jim Ketchum, Sarah Luria, and Douglas Richardson, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2011), a piece that I'll return to later in this chapter, argues that the River Survey represents the moment when Thoreau resolves the conflict between science and poetry, homocentrism and biocentrism. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, in *Thoreau: A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Walden; or, Life in the Woods; The Maine Woods, Cape Cod* (New York: The Library of America, 1985) 522.

⁶ In his wonderfully provocative *The Geographic Revolution in Early America*, Martin Brückner points out that many surveyors themselves *actively* conceived of their work as a type of literary production, complete with principles of narrative. It's also worth remembering that many of the famous nineteenth-century surveyor-explorers, Lewis and Clark, J.N. Reynolds, F.V. Hayden, John C. Frémont, and John Wesley Powell among them, produced literary accounts of their travels, often intended to accompany their surveys and maps. Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in early America: Maps, Literacy, & National Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006) 35.

⁷ Hugh Richard Sloten, *Patronage, Practice, and the Culture of American Science: Alexander Dallas Bache and the U.S. Coast Survey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁸ Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1225.

⁹ Malcolm Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) especially chapter 1, "The Early Administrative Experience,

1785-1800," 3-25; Everett Dick, *The Lure of the Land: A Social History of the Public Lands from the Articles of Confederation to the New Deal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970) especially chapter I, "Land Precedents of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," 1-8, and chapter II, "The Early Nineteenth-Century Land Program," 9-18; and Andro Linklater, *Measuring America: How the United States Was Shaped by the Greatest Land Sale in History* (New York: Plume, 2002) especially chapter 12, "The Immaculate Grid," 160-175.

¹⁰ Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 31. For the grid's ubiquity, even in New England, one has only to look at the map of northern Maine to see a perfect checkerboard of squares laid across the landscape.

¹¹ Why claim that the township was the basic building block of the American landscape? Why not the 40-acre plot? Denis Cosgrove notes that in Thomas Jefferson's vision, "the township would be the basis of self-governing communities of independent cultivators," while Malcolm Rohrbough argues that the six-mile blocks were the basic administrative units that the federal government used in charting, exploring, and carving up the landscape. Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: The University of Madison Press, 1998) 178; Rohrbough, *The Land Office*, 7-9, passim.

¹² After the Revolutionary war, surveyors set out with squares on their mind, many of them to divide the land up into "military tracts," rewards for the Revolutionary War soldiers. Ithaca is located on one of these old tracts. See Deborah Tall, *From Where We Stand: Recovering a Sense of Place* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 33.

¹³ Simeon DeWitt, *Township no. XXII : a map of township number twenty two of the lands directed by law to be surveyed for the troops of this State in the late Army of the United States* (n.p.: 1790).

¹⁴ Don Mitchell very persuasively connects the triumph of agricultural capitalism—the same system that can bring cheap tomatoes to the Northeast in the middle of winter—to the invention of a spatial scheme that prizes control above all else. It's also worth pointing out none of these gridded spaces are innocent: they all depend on some sort of violence, whether it be against the landscape itself (hills must be leveled, water courses "corrected"), insect and animal life, or the work force. William Cronon notes that the bounties of agricultural capitalism also rely on straight lines and gridded space: it was much easier, far more profitable to pull a mechanical reaper along straight lines than according to a wiggling boundary that obeyed natural features rather than the perfecting abstraction of a square. John R. Stilgoe, writes, "On the ground, only the most perceptive travelers consciously recognize section lines. Here and there a hilltop offers a view of lines and right-angle intersections, but elsewhere the grid is masked by the slightly rolling topography that characterizes most of the Middle West...Not until they drive east, into the coastal states and Kentucky, Vermont, and Tennessee, are they suddenly aware that behind them lies a landscape of more obvious order. All at once they recognize the absence of the geometrical structure that shapes their space, colors their speech, and subtly influences their lives, and they perceive the dominance of older, distinctly regional landscape skeletons." Andro Linklater's *Measuring America* is a triumphal exposition of just this idea. He argues that private property, free enterprise and the market economy, democratic relations between individuals, and indeed individualism itself all depended to various degrees on the grid. Finally, David Harvey writes, "without the possibilities inherent in geographical expansion, spatial reorganization, and uneven geographical development, capitalism would long ago have ceased to function as a political-economic system." It should by now be clear that one of the attributes of the grid is that it is easily replicable, perfectly designed to foster expansion. See Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 102; Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America*, 88; Linklater, *Measuring America*, 5, 20, 26, passim; Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 23. For a wonderful exploration of the grid and its implications, see Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), especially 7, "Elysiums for Gentlemen," 202-229; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 9, 24, 31, 37, passim; Nye, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings*, 21, 23, 25, 26.

¹⁵ Penn's commitment to city building leads John Reps, surely one of the grid's staunchest enemies, to conclude, "In the breadth of his outlook and his attention to detail Penn was unsurpassed as a colonial regional planner and administrator." John W. Reps *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965) 157-165. John R. Stilgoe fixes the date of the grid's American birth as 1681, but he focuses on when Penn actually gave the orders for laying out the city, rather than building in the time during which the idea gestated in Penn's mind. See Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America*, 88.

¹⁶ The map can be found in *Ordinances of the Corporation of the City of Philadelphia: To Which are Prefixed, the Original Charter, the Act of Incorporation, and Other Acts of Assembly Relating to the City*. (Philadelphia: Moses Thomas, 1812).

¹⁷ I should mention that designating this particular style of surveying “the southern system” is not a dig at the South, but a way to classify a completely different method of surveying, one that was at odds with the New England system, in which lands were surveyed *before* they were settled. There was plenty of speculation and corruption in the North, but not to the extent that there was south of Mason Dixon. Rohrbaugh, *The Land Office Business*, 7.

¹⁸ John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992) 240-249.

¹⁹ Andro Linklater points out that one of the democratic aspects of the quadrilinear grid was that it was easy for anyone with a basic knowledge of how a compass worked to pace out his boundaries. See Linklater, *Measuring America*, 169.

²⁰ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1984) 272.

²¹ Jefferson, *Notes*, 290-291.

²² The father of cultural landscape studies, J.B. Jackson, writes that the National Survey of 1785 embodied a “clear expression of the Jeffersonian dislike of a powerful government, centralized in cities, and the emphasis on the small rural landowner. The survey permitted and even encouraged the forming of townships with the school section in the center, townships with their own local government.” This grid system, which Jackson argues was essentially Jeffersonian, was a utopian device to ensure the cultivation of virtuous citizens. See J.B. Jackson, “Jefferson, Thoreau & After,” in *Landscapes: Selected Writings of J.B. Jackson* Ervine H. Zube, ed. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1970) p. 4, 5.

²³ Henry David Thoreau, “Walking,” in *Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems* (New York: The Library of America, 2001) 230.

²⁴ Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1721.

²⁵ Giddens privileges time as the predominant register in which modernity operates, and that the linear uniformity of time unchained it from more local, place-based chronologies, the sorts of understanding in which, for example, time was conceived of as a circle, seasonal, rather than an arrow of past and present. One of the consequences of an abstracted time is that it decoupled the relationship of time to place, made abstract, empty spaces out of inhabited places. We can argue, productively, with Giddens’s elevation of time, but I think his conclusion is sound: that divorcing time from space is an act of disenchantment, of disembedding. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 18-28.

²⁶ Or an ordinary book. Stanley Cavell proposes that loss is one-half of the central theme of Thoreau’s work, especially in *Walden*. “He is facing out the problem of writing altogether,” Cavell argues. “The writer comes to us form a sense of loss; the myth does not contain more than symbols because it is no set of desired things he has lost, but a connection with things, the track of desire itself.” “The track of desire itself”: that I think is a pretty good way to sum up Thoreau’s feeling of discontent, that modern Progress has caused an abrupt end to Thoreau’s track of desire, thrown a fence across what was once an open right-of-way. But as I said, loss is only half of Thoreau’s central theme: the other half is reconnection. Once we realize that we have lost, that we are lost, we can set about recovering our way. And one way to do that, as I’ll show, is with the right kind of map. Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden: An Expanded Edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992) 50, 51, 53.

²⁷ Linklater, *Measuring America*, 10; Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America*, 56-57; Brian Donahue, *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 78-86. From the outset, the southern landscape was seen through the lens of a get-rich-quick-and-get-out enterprise. By 1640, Virginia’s landscape was devastated: tobacco and swidden agriculture had ruined the land and deep erosional gullies had stripped feet of topsoil from farmers’ fields. And whereas in new England “town” meant the sum total of everything needed to sustain life – fields, woods, and mineral deposits as well as roads and dwellings – in the South “town” meant a collection of stores and shops. It meant the site of capital. There is, however, one important exception: the hills were often thought of as a commons by the people who lived there, but “hillbillies” have always been seen by the South’s elite as the region’s lowest white class, and their conception of a commons was held to be equally degenerate. Notorious Fire-Eater and agricultural reformer Edmund Ruffin and his fellow Southern gentlemen “took no pleasure in the knowledge that many landless, shabbily dressed men actually possessed modest wealth in animals – sustained on other men’s property,” writes Jack Temple Kirby. See Stilgoe, *Common Landscape*

of America, 58-69; Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002) 134-150; Jack temple Kirby, *Mockingbird Song*, 76-79, 121.

²⁸ Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005) 78-79.

²⁹ Land was even measured in decimals. Gunter's chain – the ubiquitous tool used to measure land in America—was composed of 100 links separated into 10 sets of ten. For much of this discussion of the tension between lived in versus commoditized spaces, I'm using J.B. Jackson's classic distinction here, between political and inhabited landscapes. Political landscapes, he writes, are intended to provide security, order, and continuity for their creators, while inhabited landscapes are place-based, evolutionary, something shared. Of course, it would probably be difficult to find any landscape that adheres militantly to either one or the other ideal—Jackson admits as much when he argues that both types always exist together in the American landscapes—but it's worth seeing these ideals as historically rooted in particular ideologies. Linklater, *Measuring America*, 5, 16-17; John Brinkerhoff Jackson, "A Pair of Ideal Landscapes," in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 11, 14, 15, 28, 42, 54.

³⁰ David Schuyler points out that New York city, with its long, deep lots stretching behind narrow store fronts, was designed to maximize commerce, and that *living* as opposed to accumulating, was of secondary concern to the city's planners: New York is "a monument to the primacy of commercial and speculative values. Underlying the plan was a particular conception of the city, one in which the urban dynamic was defined not by streets or public buildings but by the waterfront and adjacent warehouses." David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) 20.

³¹ James C. Scott writes, "the very concept of the modern state [and, by extension, the modern economy] presupposes a vastly simplified and uniform property regime that is legible and hence manipulable from the center." This property regime is absolutely based on private ownership and private gain: "the history of property...has meant the inexorable incorporation of what were once thought of as free gifts of nature." Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 35, 39.

³² For an exploration of how municipal parks have preserved a countermodern landscape tradition, see Aaron Sachs, "American Arcadia: Mount Auburn Cemetery and the Nineteenth-Century Landscape Tradition," *Environmental History* 15 (April, 2010): 206-235.

³³ This intuition has become absolutely foundational among scholars who work on mapping and American culture. See Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 12; Leo Marx, "The American Ideology of Space." In *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams, eds. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1991) 63; Nye, *America as Second Creation*, 25; Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*, 29 passim; Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in early America*, 238; though he does not explicitly cite the belief in an empty, a-historical power, much of D.W. Meinig's *The Shaping of America* assumes as much. See D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping Of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*. Vol. 3, *Transcontinental America, 1850-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Jonathan Smith, "The Lie That Binds: Destabilizing the Text of Landscape." In *Place/Culture/Representation*. James Duncan and David Ley, eds. (London: Routledge, 1993) 78, passim. There are many other scholars who find cartography as erasure in an international context as well. See Matthew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997) 115, passim; and Raymond Craib's excellent, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), especially "Introduction: Writing a Spatial History of Modern Mexico," 1-17.

³⁴ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 102, 114-123; Boutmy quoted on 53-5.

³⁵ Think of the "pressure valve" theory of US western expansion in the nineteenth-century: one reason, it was theorized, that Americans needed ever increasing territory was to create market opportunities for an ever-increasing population and an equally expanding market economy. The term "spatial fix" comes from David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 26-31.

³⁶ Linklater, *Measuring America*, 149-150.

³⁷ Thoreau, *Journal* 2: 1170.

³⁸ At the risk of belaboring the point, I want to emphasize how much the poststructural (and, I might add, the post-colonial) emphasis on the power of the hegemon has to offer, and also how much these critical insights have meant to my own work. Discovering these scholars was, it still *is*, very exciting for me. And yet...they can leave one feeling politically helpless. I think this is one reason why I have been so attracted to David Harvey who writes, "the task of critical analysis is not, surely, to prove the impossibility of foundational beliefs (or truths), but to find a more plausible and adequate basis for the foundational beliefs that make interpretation and political action meaningful, creative, and possible." See David Harvey, *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Blackwell

Publishing, 1996), 2. For poststructuralist spatial readings that seem overly focused on domination, see, for instance, J.B. Harley, one of the founders of the poststructuralist deconstruction of mapping. Among his many relevant essays, see *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*. Paul Laxton, ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), especially Chapters 2, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power," 51-81; 3, "Silence and Secrecy: The Hidden Agenda of Cartography in Early Modern Europe," 83-107; and 6, "New England Cartography and the Native Americans," 169-195; Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) 330-336; Mitchell, *Lie of the Land*; Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*; Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in early America*; Though she doesn't work on mapping *per se*, much of Mary Louise Pratt's analysis fits in Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), especially chapter 2, "Science, planetary consciousness, interiors," 15-37; Edney, *Mapping an Empire*.

³⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith, trans. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 68. For an examination of how space is absolutely a constitutive element of, well, of everything, see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time & Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: The University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), especially chapter 1, "Indigenous Space and Ancient Maps," 20-36; Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 61, 63, 68, *passim*; D. Graham Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed: Exploration, Geography, and a British El Dorado* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000) 184-185; and Edney, *Mapping an Empire* 76.

⁴¹ "Different landscape concepts rest on different ontologies, on varying notions of what the world is and what's worth pointing out about it," writes George L. Henderson, and it's this insight that initially launched this chapter: we are not powerless in the face of a (seemingly) unified ideology. Thankfully, there are an increasing number of thinkers concerned with space whose work begins this process of reconnection, who are not only willing to argue that maps, surveying, and cartography—our understanding of landscape—is powerful, but that its power need not only be destructive. They show that mapmaking—landscape making—is never simple, never entirely, hegemonically dominated by exploitation. Rather, the technology of surveying and mapmaking, of landscape construction, depends for its power on human usage. Use matters. And if we go back to the maxim whose subterranean power drives this section, "Different landscape concepts rest on different ontologies, on varying notions of what the world is and what's worth pointing out about it," then there is no reason whatsoever that we cannot have a landscape built on justice, health, beauty, and connection.

The insight that use matters has become one of the important perceptions coming out of both science and technology studies (see Ronald Kline and Trevor Pinch, "Users as Agents of Technological Change: The Social Construction of the Automobile in the Rural United States," *Technology and Culture* 37 no.4 (Oct., 1996) 764) and the brand of poststructuralism which seeks to read a radical agency back into our critical analyses (see de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 21). Denis Wood argues that once we understand the cultural constructedness of all forms of space, then we can see that they are "capacitated as powerful ways of making statements about the world." And those statements can be whatever we want them to be.

And as Henri Lefebvre has shown, new political economies can only evolve along with new spaces, for politics, economy, and landscape are not three radically different entities, but rather thickly intertwined, mutually constructive: "A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions, or political apparatuses. A social revolution, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language, and on space – though its impact need not occur at the same rate, or with equal force, in each of these areas." See George L. Henderson, "What (Else) We Talk About When We Talk About Landscape: For a Return to the Social Imagination," in *Everyday America*, Paul Groth and Chris Wilson, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 195; Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 16. For others who restore a sense of agency to landscape representation, see, *Wisdom Sits in Places*; Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed*; Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*; Noel Castree, "Differential geographies: place, indigenous rights and 'local' resources," *Political Geography* 23 (2004): 133-167; Craib, *Cartographic Mexico* and "Relocating Cartography," *Postcolonial Studies* 12: 4, 481-490; Arturo Escobar, "Culture sits in places: reflections on globalism and subaltern strategies of localization," *Political Geography* 20 (2001): 139-174; Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007); Barbara Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996); Nancy Lee Peluso, "Whose Woods Are These?:"

Counter-Mapping Forest Territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia." *Antipode* 27, 4 (1995): 383-406; and Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995); Denis Wood with John Fels, *The Power of Maps* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1992) 2,12, *passim*. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 54.

⁴² Thoreau, *Journals*, 1:183.

⁴³ In the disciplinary niches that I call my intellectual homes—cultural and environmental history—Thoreau has come to be canonized in a variety of ways. Leo Marx has given us a complex, solipsistic Thoreau, The Pastoral Writer. Roderick Frazier Nash and Max Oelschlaeger gave us a heroic Thoreau, the “Philosopher of Wilderness.” When, in the mid 1990s wilderness underwent a much-needed critical reconsideration and emerged less-than-pristine, our Philosopher of Wilderness similarly seemed less heroic, more of a Sophist, and more complicit in the creation of an ultra-modern, abstracting, perhaps even dangerous ideology. Then there is Thoreau the Subversive Scientist, the proto-ecologist searching for interconnection. This is a Thoreau pioneered by Donald Worster in *Nature’s Economy*. Finally, we have Thoreau the loafer, the man who was seemingly allergic to work, and who heaped opprobrium on anyone who had to labor for a living. Thoreau the Surveyor, gets mentioned, if at all, only in passing. This, as Lawrence Buell points out, is one of the traps of canonization: it can, at the same time, serve the purposes of critical provocation and critical anesthesia, and it has certainly been a problem with scholarship on Thoreau. In a recent article in *Environmental History*, Kent Curtis has outlined the ways in which environmental historians have tended to use Thoreau, and writes that, at this point, he is less of a historical character and “more and more of a narrative device,” intended to show the alienation and abstraction developing in nineteenth-century America. See Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* 244-265; Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Fourth ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 84-95; Oelschlaeger, “Henry David Thoreau: Philosopher of the Wilderness,” in *The Idea of Wilderness*, 133-171; William Cronon, “The Trouble With Wilderness; or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (Edited by William Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996) 71, 74-75; Jennifer Price, “Remaking American Environmentalism: On the Banks of the L.A. River,” *Environmental History* 13, 3 (July, 2008), 542; Worster, *Nature’s Economy*, 59-76; Laura Dassow Walls’s fantastic, *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, 64, 65; Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995) xi; Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 24; Kent Curtis, “The Virtue of Thoreau: Biography, Geography and History in Walden Woods,” *Environmental History* 15 (January 2010) 37.

⁴⁴ Most scholars of Thoreau would probably disagree, making some sort of argument like the one Lawrence Buell offers: “Although Thoreau took pride in his skill and success at [surveying], his actual contract work as a surveyor generally seems to have disaffected him and left him with the impression that he had compromised himself by having to anesthetize his proper sensitivities while pursuing the trade. One suspects that the survey that gave him most satisfaction was the one he did for literary purposes, the survey of Walden Pond.” But in what follows, I think it is clear that Thoreau had a much more complicated relationship to surveying. Leslie Wilson, for instance, argues that Thoreau found some sort of deep satisfaction in his surveying. See Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 478n64; Wilson, “Thoreau’s Manuscript Surveys,” 25.

⁴⁵ Thoreau, *Journals*, 1:280.

⁴⁶ Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1240-1241.

⁴⁷ Thoreau, “Walking,” 234; Thoreau, *Journals*, 1:307.

⁴⁸ Thoreau, *Journals*, 1:308. Thoreau’s writing desk is at the Concord museum, and underneath it is a spot where he would wipe the excess ink from his pen.

⁴⁹ Matthew Potteiger and Jamie Purinton write that landscapes are about “relinquishing control to the viewer/reader who must put together sequences, fill in the gaps, and decipher the meaning. And since most landscapes are shaped by environmental and cultural processes, they do not have an author or narrator. In turn, the viewer must find the stories and become the narrator.” See Potteiger and Purinton, *Landscape Narratives*, 10.

⁵⁰ Thoreau, *Journals*, 1:579.

⁵¹ Indeed, Max Oelschlaeger notes that Thoreau sought to incorporate science with “Indian wisdom,” a sort of situated knowledge that came only from living in and with a landscape. Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, 139, 145, 149, 150, 153.

⁵² Walter Harding notes that in 1840 Thoreau purchased two surveying instruments for use in the school he and his brother John had opened two years earlier. But where, and when did he learn to use these instruments? There is

some debate as to when, exactly, Thoreau began his surveying, and I would argue that he was actively taking detailed measurements by 1840 – if not yet, perhaps, employed in the field. There is a document in the Henry David Thoreau Papers at the Concord Free Public Library that is a beautiful, carefully drawn map establishing the locations and distances of various Concord landmarks relative to each other. Along with a correction for the local magnetic variation of his compass, there is the following note: “At 9 o’clock PM Dec. 19th 1840 – it being exactly above the pole. variation of compass corrected by obs. or North Star.” Thoreau was personally correcting the variation of a compass by observing the Pole Star. Finally, Patrick Chura argues that Thoreau first learned to survey when he and his brother John used it for the school they ran, sometime between 1839 and 1841. Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 83-84; Henry David Thoreau, “Bearing By the Compass – which varied 9° West of the Pole.” N.D. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 9. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library; Chura, “Economic and Environmental Perspectives in the Surveying ‘Field Notes’ of Henry David Thoreau,” 38.

⁵³ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003) 27. For a fascinating reading of *Moby Dick* along spatial lines – one that suggests Melville’s ambivalence towards American territorial expansion, see Baker, *Heartless Immensity*, especially chapter 2, “Mapping and Measuring with Ahab and Wilkes,” 30-43.

⁵⁴ E.O. Wilson, ed. “Introduction,” in *From So Simple a Beginning: The Four Great Books of Charles Darwin* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006) 17.

⁵⁵ Sachs, *The Humboldt Current*, 11; Laura Dassow Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* (The University of Chicago Press, 2009) 13.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York: Monticello Editions, 1966); Wallace Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

⁵⁷ And in a nicely reciprocal way, Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is based in part on the report of J.N. Reynold’s 1836 *Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition to the Pacific Ocean and South Seas* given before Congress in support of exploration.

⁵⁸ John Hessler writes that Thoreau was a “historian of cartography,” and that the maps he drew and consulted “deeply enriched the unique sense of place that have made him an iconic American author.” Hessler, “From Ortelius to Champlain,” 1, 22.

⁵⁹ Henry D Thoreau, “‘Lovering and Bond on Mag. Observation at Cambridge,’ Am. Acad. 1846.” N.D. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 9. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library; Bond, William C. to Henry David Thoreau. “Diurnal Magnetic variation...” June 9th, 1851. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 9. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library; Henry David Thoreau, “[Scene at?] the Cam. Observatory and Library.” ND. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 9. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library. This last is a fascinating resource in which Thoreau notes books he ought to read: “‘Observations made of the Magnetic and Meteorological Observatory, at Toronto in Canada – Printed by order of her Majesty’s Government, under the superintendence of Lieut. Col. Ed. Sabine, of the Royal Artillery. Vol 1. – 1840, 1841, 1842. London 1845, Greenwich Mag & Meteor Ob. in several volumes...A Partial Report of the Cambridge Observations...Prof. Swards [sic] Observation in Cambridge in 1782...Remarks in Bowditch’s navigation...Also Mag & Meteor ob of the Girard College in 3 volumes...Also [G?]illis Mag & Meteor Ob. at Washington dated 1838...Scoresby’s Mag Investigations – (recommended by Bond) in 2 parts thin octavo...? Riddells Mag. Inductions’” and notes that Alexander von Humboldt was likewise quite interested in magnetic variation: “Humboldt thinks the declination was known as early as the 12th century. This discovery is generally credited to Columbus Humboldt says ‘Columbus has not only the incontestible [sic] merit of having first discovered a line without magnetic “variation” but, also of having, by his considerations on the progressive increase of westerly declination in receding from this line, given the first impulse to the study of terrestrial magnetism in Europe.’”

⁶⁰ Thoreau was apparently an avid student, and on the end pages of his copy, Thoreau wrote out “Galbraith’s rule for finding the sine or tangent of a small arc, less than three degrees” followed by two pages of examples and auxiliary rules. Charles Davies, LL.D, *Elements of Surveying, and Navigation; With a Description of the Instruments and the Necessary Tables*, Revised Edition (New York, A.S. Barnes & Co., 1847) The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library, 92, 97.

⁶¹ On November 30, 1850, Thoreau surveyed a wood lot for Thomas Hale and “----- Bingham,” and was careful to shoot a number of back bearings, none of which accorded exactly with his regular bearings. Henry D. Thoreau,

“Field Notes of Surveys made by Henry D. Thoreau since November, 1849,” Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 11, The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library, 32; Henry David Thoreau, “Walking,” 234.

⁶² Chura is especially good on this point. See Chura, *Thoreau the Land Surveyor*, especially chapter 2, “Material to Mythology,” 22-44.

⁶³ On July 3, 1851 Thoreau checked his compass 9 times between 7am and 7pm, and to give a taste of the detail of Thoreau’s obsession, here’s his entry for the previous day: “[after first finding the variation to be $9\frac{5}{8}^{\circ}$, he placed his] compass on Mr. Bloods [sic] meridian and found the var. the same vis $9\frac{5}{8}^{\circ}$. At 12 M when I returned, the var = $9\frac{7}{8}$ – at $2\frac{1}{2}$ ockl [sic] PM var = $9\frac{7}{8}+$ - at $4\frac{1}{2}$... $9\frac{7}{8}$...at 6 ... 10 -.” This is then followed by a penciled note that “these last 4 doubtful on account of motion of [illegible] door.” Furthermore, Thoreau performed the difficult experiment of comparing his compass to the north star at least two times, once in 1840, and once, to his apparent joy, in 1851: “Found the direction of the Pole Star with greatest Meridian Elongation...at 9h26m PM!” Henry D. Thoreau, “Field Notes” 38, 63; and “Bearing By the Compass – which varied 9° West of the Pole.”

⁶⁴ If there is anywhere one would expect to find the ideology of what Thongchai Winichakul terms the geo-body stamped in black-and-white, surely the pages of surveying manuals should be prime hunting ground. And, indeed, certain ones, such as Thoreau’s copy of *Elements of Surveying*, are full of such a spatial imagination. But it seems that primers on surveying were intended to serve the needs of different audiences, and some, like James Pederer’s *The Farmer’s Land Measurer*, dispense with tools and specialized units of measurement entirely. Others, such as Horatio Robinson’s *A Treatise on Surveying and Navigation* proclaim outright that precision is a myth, and only personal experience can be a surveyor’s guide. For examples of the more “rigorous” manuals, in addition to Davies, see Rev. George Clinton Whitlock, M.A., *Elements of Geometry, Theoretical and Practical: Containing a Full Explanation of the Construction and Use of Tables, and a New System of Surveying* (New York: Pratt, Woodford, & Co., 1849); Lewis M. Haupt, *The Topographer, His Instruments and Methods. Designed for the use of Students, Amateur Topographers, Surveyors, Engineers, and All Persons Interested in the Location and Construction of Works Based Upon Topography. Illustrated with Numerous Plates, Maps, and Engravings* (New York: J.M. Stoddart, 1883); W.M. Gillespie, *A Treatise on Land-Surveying: Comprising the Theory Developed from Five Elementary Principles; and the Practice with the Chain Alone, the Compass, the Transit, the Theodolite, the Plane Table, &c. Illustrated by Four Hundred Engravings and a Magnetic Chart* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1860). For manual that allow for slightly less exactitude, see James Pedder, *The Farmer’s Land-Measurer, or Pocket Companion; showing, at one view, the content of any piece of land, from dimensions taken in yards. With a set of useful agricultural tables* (New York: C.M. Saxton, Barker & Co., 1860); and Horatio N. Robinson, A.M. *A Treatise on Surveying and Navigation: Uniting the Theoretical, Practical, and Educational Features of these Subjects*, 3rd ed. (Cincinnati: Jacob Ernst, 1853).

⁶⁵ Haupt, *The Topographer*, xiii. See also Gillespie, *A Treatise on Land-Surveying*.

⁶⁶ For an exploration of how thoroughly the culture of reform affected American culture, especially its literary culture, see David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), especially Part One, “God’s Bow, Man’s Arrows: Religion, Reform, and American Literature” 15-165. For an in-depth analysis of how the culture of reform made its presence felt within the ranks of Transcendentalists, see Anne C. Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement, 1830-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); and Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

⁶⁷ On the convergence of a specific kind of masculinity with engineering, see Ruth Oldenziel, *Making Technology Masculine: Men, Women and Modern Machines in America, 1870-1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999).

⁶⁸ Todd Shalatt, *Structures in the Stream: Water, Science, and the Rise of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994) 83.

⁶⁹ The hachure system, used to indicate elevation before topographical lines became fashionable, is a fine example of the cartographic imagination. Hachures are quite good at representing the amount of light reflected from a surface: the steeper the incline, the less light reflected. But wooded areas reflect less light than farm fields, open water less than ice; and so the hach-marks, by looking past the vegetation, obscure as much of the landscape as they reveal.

⁷⁰ Henry David Thoreau, “Life Without Principle” in *Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems*, (New York: The Library of Modern America, 2001) p. 362.

⁷¹ Henry David Thoreau, "Saw at Cambridge Today..." November 18th, 1850. Transcription of manuscript. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 9. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library.

⁷² Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, 276-277.

⁷³ Thoreau, *Field Notes of Surveys made by Henry D. Thoreau since November, 1849*, 69.

⁷⁴ Thoreau, *Journals*, 1:270.

⁷⁵ Thoreau, *Journals*, 1:247.

⁷⁶ Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1476. Thoreau's surveying journal ends sometime in February of 1858, and from then on, he seemed to keep his surveying notes along with his personal journal.

⁷⁷ Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1482.

⁷⁸ Thoreau, *Field Notes of Surveys made by Henry D. Thoreau since November, 1849*, 48.

⁷⁹ The railroad, it is sometimes forgotten, is one of the key sites – characters, almost – in *Walden*, and indeed, the chapter "Sounds" revolves around the iron horse. "The whistle of the locomotive penetrates my woods summer and winter, sounding like the scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer's yard, informing me that many restless city merchants are arriving within the circle of the town, or adventurous country traders from the other side...Here come your groceries, country; your rations, countrymen! Nor is there any man so independent on his country farm that he can say them nay. And here's your pay for them! screams the countryman's whistle; timber like long battering rams going twenty miles and hour against the city's walls, and chairs enough to seat all the weary and heavy laden that dwell within them. With such huge and lumbering civility the country hands a chair to the city. All the Indian huckleberry hills are stripped, all the cranberry meadows are raked into the city...so is your pastoral life whirled past and away." This sounds remarkably familiar, remarkably like a poetic *Nature's Metropolis* from 1854. Thoreau, *Walden*, 414-419.

⁸⁰ Jane Bennett notes that Thoreau is an absolute master of the nature/culture finesse. Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 92.

⁸¹ One of the founding arguments in Robert Richardson's very good intellectual biography of Thoreau, is that his life was devoted to focusing on process, in order to make us "feel nature as well as see it." This is a key insight. See Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 54, *passim*.

⁸² Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, 142.

⁸³ I have chosen *not* to indicate the both the words Thoreau originally wrote, then crossed out *and* the penciled corrections. I have, instead, decided to go with the penciled corrections. For those who are concerned, here is my transcription of the original:

Moonlight is the best restorer of antiquity. On a mild night, when the moon shines full, the houses in our village have a classical elegance, and at such an hour remind *me* [crossed out, and (one?) penciled in] of *whatever is* [crossed out, and (the?) penciled in] most famous and excellent in art. The unfinished *structure* [building] stands like a living creature under the [stars?] of night, intercepting the stars with its rafters. Whatever architect [1 or 2 words illegible] home had by day, it acknowledges only [the master of, penciled in] situations *as* [by] night. *The architectural* [illegible] *of its bare rafters and its irregular staging built around it, declares an old* [illegible] [all crossed out]. The staging which the workmen erect for their convenience, has [often, penciled in] an unintentional and flowing grace, and is [3 crossed out words illegible] *one* [the, penciled in] only genuine native architecture, *and* [crossed out] deserves to stand larger than the building it surrounds.

[whole paragraph crossed out]

"We never tire of the beauty of certain epithets which have *slowly* [been gradually, added in pencil] bestowed on the Harvest and Hermit's moon. There is something pleasing in the fact that the irregularity in the rising of the two moons, and their continuing to rise nearly at the same time for several nights, *should have been* [crossed out and replaced by was] observed by the husbandmen before it attracted the attention of science.

"All great laws are *really* [replaced by commonly] known to the simplest necessities of man before they become the subject of science.

Thoreau often gave names to the different full moons, adding to September and October's well known Harvest and Hunter's Moons. I've seen glancing allusions to the Hermit Moon suggesting that it rose in November – when the crops were in, the firewood stacked, and the food secured. It was supposedly a time for reflection, and for planning the future. But it is entirely possible that this was a name of Thoreau's creation, independent of other

usages. Finally, this bit of writing seems to be something that Thoreau was working on for at least twenty years. Sometime between 1842 and 1844 (his entry is undated), Thoreau copied into his journal a fragment that is very similar to the one I have reproduced here, though either less or more complete. And in his posthumously published essay, "Night and Moonlight" (1864), Thoreau again reworks this figure of moonlight as the "great restorer of antiquity." This version was originally a lecture given in Plymouth, Massachusetts, on October 8, 1854, and Thoreau's biographer, Walter Harding, argues that it stems from notes Thoreau took on his moonlit walks in the summer of 1851. Whatever the case may be, it does seem entirely reasonable to suggest that Thoreau was working on this bit of writing during the period he was a surveyor. Henry David Thoreau, "Moonlight is the best restorer of antiquity." N.D. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 10. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library. Henry David Thoreau, *The Writing of Henry David Thoreau: Journal* vol. 2, 1842-1848 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 23-244; Henry David Thoreau, "Night and Moonlight" in *Excursions* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864) 318; Harding, 341.

⁸⁴ It's true: Henry David Thoreau, giant of American literature, didn't know how to tie his shoes until he was 36 years old. He tries to explain it away as a simple mistake—he had learned to tie a granny knot, which will always come loose, rather than the square knot the rest of us learn—but his embarrassment shows through his prose. Thoreau, *Journals* 1:612.

⁸⁵ Thoreau, *Journals* 1:605.

⁸⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *The Maine Woods* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987) 95. Though *The Maine Woods* was published posthumously, it is a collection of journal entries Thoreau made in 1846, 1853, and 1857. He climbed Katahdin in September of 1846. Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, 208-209.

⁸⁷ Thoreau, *Journals* 1:898.

⁸⁸ Thoreau, *Journals*, 1:387.

⁸⁹ Geographical information comes from Herbert W. Gleason's 1906 map, "Map of Concord, Mass. Showing Localities Mentioned by Thoreau in his Journals." See Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1754-1755.

⁹⁰ Thoreau, *Journals*, 1:606, 610. It is in his entry of July 25 that he remarks on the coolness of the stripped sapling.

⁹¹ Of course, I have no way of knowing when Henry penned this famous line from *Walden*, or what, if anything, prompted him to this reflection. But I like to think that I have imagined something that, if not strictly true, nonetheless feels right. Thoreau, *Walden*, 400.

⁹² Thoreau, *Journals*, 1:606.

⁹³ Henry David Thoreau, Nature Notes, 1851-1860. MS. MA 610. The Morgan Library.

⁹⁴ Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1230.

⁹⁵ Thoreau, *Journals* 1:610-611.

⁹⁶ Thanks to Laura Martin for help with my historical botanizing.

⁹⁷ Thoreau, *Journals*: 1:615.

⁹⁸ Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1497.

⁹⁹ Thoreau, *Journals*, 1:379. Eric Wilson notes that Thoreau literally sought to write a river in *A Week On the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* and a plant in *Walden*. Eric Wilson, *Romantic Turbulence: Chaos, Ecology and American Space* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) 95.

¹⁰⁰ Thoreau, *Walden*, 568.

¹⁰¹ Thoreau, *Walden*, 587.

¹⁰² Donahue, *The Great Meadow*, xv, 99-100, 155, passim.

¹⁰³ Thoreau, *Journals* 1:613.

¹⁰⁴ In 1860, however, the farmers won and the dam was ordered torn down. But upon appeal, the state decided to repeal its order, and thus corporate power, in the end, carried the day. For a much more detailed investigation of the long history of conflict over the Merrimack River watershed, of which the Concord River is a part, see Theodore Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); For a history of the struggle over the Concord River, and the triumph of corporate rather than agricultural interests, see especially Brian Donahue, "'Dammed at Both Ends and Cursed in the Middle:' The 'Flowage' of the Concord River Meadows, 1798-1862," *Environmental Review* 13 no. 3-4 (Fall/Winter, 1989): 47-68.

¹⁰⁵ Donahue, "'Dammed at Both Ends and Cursed in the Middle,'" 53.

¹⁰⁶ See Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated*, especially chapter 6, "Depleted Waters," 166-204. Carol Sheriff argues that the 1820s, 30s, and 40s saw a shift in legal priorities from protecting private property to protecting commerce. See

Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996) 101-102.

¹⁰⁷ Donahue, “‘Dammed at Both Ends,’” 54-55.

¹⁰⁸ Simon, Brown, ed., *The New England Farmer; A Monthly Journal, Devoted to Agriculture, Horticulture, and their Kindred Arts and Sciences; and Illustrated with Numerous Beautiful Engravings*, 11 (1859) 207.

¹⁰⁹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 613-617. See also Sandage’s fantastic *Born Losers, Larding the Lean Earth*; Nye, *America as Second Creation*, 4, 11, 14, passim; Marx, “Does Improved Technology Mean Progress?,” 34, 71. For the Concord Farmers’ Club, see The Concord Farmers’ Club, 1859-1860. 1859. Concord Farmers’ Club Records, 1852-1883, Vault A10, Unit 3, Box 3, Folder 1. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library; The Concord Farmers’ Club, 1858-1859. 1858. Concord Farmers’ Club Records, 1852-1883, Vault A10, Unit 3, Box 3, Folder 1. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library; The Concord Farmers’ Club, 1860-1861. 1860. Concord Farmers’ Club Records, 1852-1883, Vault A10, Unit 3, Box 3, Folder 1. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library; The Concord Farmers’ Club, 1861-1862. 1861. Concord Farmers’ Club Records, 1852-1883, Vault A10, Unit 3, Box 3, Folder 1. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library;

¹¹⁰ Donahue, *The Great Meadow*, especially chapter 9, “Epilogue: Beyond the Meadows,” 221-234.

¹¹¹ Amy Greenberg notes that though editor John L. O’Sullivan is usually given credit with coining the term in 1845, in his famous essay, “Annexation,” it was most likely one of his female writers, Jane McManus Storm, also known as Cora Montgomery, who actually thought up the phrase and first used it in an article entitled, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” published in her boss’s journal, *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*. See Amy Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 20. For a wonderful exploration of the term “Go Ahead Age,” see Sandage, *Born Losers*, 24-27; On progress and the cultural influence of Jacksonianism, see especially Lewis Perry, *Boats Against the Current*, 5, 18, 26, 30, passim. Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 52, 62, passim; Smith, *Virgin Land*; Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*; Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*.

¹¹² Emerson, *Nature*, 6.

¹¹³ Anne C. Rose’s *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement* is one of the best, most analytically sympathetic takes on Fruitlands and Brook Farm in particular, and politically radical communes in general, that I’ve read. Though she critiques Alcott and his fellow utopians for their at time unrealistic expectations (originally, they declined to use animal labor to plow the fields, thinking that such a use of an animal was cruel—it goes without saying that they were all vegetarians), and points out that the Brook Farmers ultimately couldn’t quite overcome the social distinctions of their time, she nevertheless argues that the communes were intensely powerful responses to the alienation of capitalism, and that their appeal was widespread—and thus we scholars dismiss it at our own peril. See chapter 4, “Economy,” 109-161; see also Gura, *American Transcendentalism*, especially chapter 6, “Heaven on Earth,” 150-179; Gura, *American Transcendentalism*, xi, xii, 14.

¹¹⁴ Aaron Sachs has convincingly traced one of the roots of the garden city movement back to urban cemeteries, which began to crop up in American cities in 1831, with the founding of Boston’s Mount Auburn. He furthermore argues that these first cemeteries were explicitly meant to counter the culture of capitalism in that they recognized limits, in the form of death. All talk of limits, of death, is, of course, completely antithetical to the narrative of capitalist Progress, in which continual growth is not only the ideal, but the only reality that many choose to recognize. Sachs, “American Arcadia,” 208, 210, 218, 222-223. Steven Stoll’s, *The Great Delusion: A Mad Inventor, Death in the Tropics, and the Utopian Origins of Economic Growth* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), is a wonderful exploration of just how wishful and unfounded is the thinking underlying the rhetoric which claims a rising tide lifts all boats.

¹¹⁵ Jonathan H. Earle does much to rehabilitate the northern faction of the Democratic party, and is an especially good source for information on Evans. Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery & the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 27-37.

¹¹⁶ Thoreau, *Walden*, 331.

¹¹⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Thoreau,” in *Thoreau as Seen By His Contemporaries*, Walter Harding, ed. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1960) 17.

¹¹⁸ Throughout *Walden*, Thoreau constantly harangues his fellow New Englanders, those very people who pride themselves on being tough-minded, skeptical Yankees, that in their pursuit of material wealth, they have been blinded to the Eden all around them: “I also have in my mind that seemingly wealthy, but most terribly impoverished class of all, who have accumulated dross, but know not how to use it, or get rid of it, and thus have

forged their own golden or silver fetters." Thoreau, *Walden*, 335. For more instances, see also pages 326, 336, 363-364, 390, 395, 402. See also the passage from "Walking" cited earlier, "I saw...some worldly miser with a surveyor looking after his bounds, while heaven had taken place around him, and he did not see the angles going to and fro," Thoreau, "Walking," 230.

¹¹⁹ Emily Dickinson, "101" in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Thomas H. Johnson, ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960) 9-50; LeMenager very ably captures the many ambivalences surrounding Manifest destiny—even amongst those who were its braying trumpets. But she then goes one step further, pointing out the danger of letting such a become hegemonic amongst today's contemporary scholars: "As a rhetorical marker of dominant ideology, Manifest Destiny is always in danger of achieving transcendence, even where it is reviled." LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies*, 4.

¹²⁰ Thoreau, *Walden*, 329.

¹²¹ Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in *Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems* (New York: The Library of America, 2001) 219.

¹²² Henry David Thoreau, "Huckleberries." In *Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems* (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 494-495.

¹²³ *Report of the Joint Special Committee upon the Subject of the Flowage of Meadows on Concord and Sudbury Rivers* (Boston: William White, Printer to the State, 1860) 49.

¹²⁴ Committee of the Proprietors of Sudbury and Concord River Meadows, River Meadow Committee for the Town of... 1859. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 6. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library.

¹²⁵ Simon Brown, David Heard, John W. Simonds, and Samuel H. Rhoades to Henry Thoreau. 6/4/1859. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 6. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library. *Report of the Joint Special Committee*, 128.

¹²⁶ Though it is not possible to say *exactly* when Thoreau chopped his mark into the willow tree, it was certainly there by July 4, as he mentions it explicitly in Henry David Thoreau, "July 4th '59." 1859. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 6. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library. The first mention of the willow in his journal appears on the inside cover of manuscript volume 29, April 8, 1859-September 21, 1859, and so is undated. See Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, Morgan. Nevertheless, given Thoreau's penchant for measuring things accurately, I do not think it is any stretch of the imagination to think that one of his first acts would be to create a reliable witness.

¹²⁷ Thoreau, *Journals* 1:33.

¹²⁸ Thoreau, *Journals* 2:1489.

¹²⁹ Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, Morgan, inside cover.

¹³⁰ Thoreau, *Journals* 1:211.

¹³¹ Thoreau, *Journals* 1:259.

¹³² Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, 326. According to Kenneth Walter Cameron, Thoreau first appeared in defense of Spaulding's claim in December of 1853, and spent much of January 1854 in court (there is a typo in Cameron's article, stating that Thoreau spent most of January 1856 in court, but the journal entries he uses for evidence all come from January, '54). See Kenneth Walter Cameron, "Thoreau in the Court of Common Pleas (1854)," *The Emerson Society Quarterly* 14, 1 (1959): 86-89.

¹³³ Thoreau, *Journals* 1:425.

¹³⁴ Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, 34, 37. LeMenager points out that *A Week* can be read as a book pointing out and contrasting two different ways of valuing a river: the commercial, and the poetic. LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies*, 121.

¹³⁵ Thoreau, *Journal*, 2:1134.

¹³⁶ Thoreau, *Journals* 1:641.

¹³⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson to Elizabeth Hoar, August 3, 1859. The Morgan Library. After Thoreau's death, Emerson was asked to write a biographical sketch for an edition of Thoreau's writings called *Excursions*. Perhaps feeling that he had spoken ungenerously towards Thoreau on too many occasions—including, famously, during his eulogy for his deceased erstwhile student—Emerson used the occasion of the biographical sketch to cast a rather different view of Thoreau's river survey: "Mr. Thoreau dedicated his genius with such entire love to the fields, hills, and waters of his native town, that he made them known and interesting to all reading Americans, and to people over the sea. The river on whose banks he was born and died he knew from its springs to its confluence with the Merrimack. He had made summer and winter observations on it for many years, and at a every hour of the day and the night. The result

of the recent survey of the Water Commissioners appointed by the State of Massachusetts he had reached by his private experiments, several years earlier. Every fact which occurs in the bed, on the banks, or in the air over it; the fishes and their spawning and nests, their manners, their food; the shad-flies which fill the air on a certain evening once a year, and which are snapped at by the fishes so ravenously that many of these die of repletion; the conical heaps of small stones on the river-shallows, one of which heaps will sometimes overfill a cart,—these heaps the huge nests of small fishes; the birds which frequent the stream, heron, duck, sheldrake, loon, osprey; the snake, musk-rat, otter, woodchuck, and fox, on the banks; the turtle, frog, hyla, and cricket, which make the banks vocal,—were all known to him, and, as it were, townsmen and fellow-creatures; so that he felt an absurdity or violence in any narrative of one of these by itself apart, and still more of its dimensions on an inch-rule, or in the exhibition of its skeleton, or the specimen of a squirrel or a bird in brandy. He liked to speak of the manners of the river, as itself a lawful creature, yet with exactness, and always to an observed fact. As he knew the river, so the ponds in the region.” See Thoreau, *Excursions*, 18-19.

¹³⁸ Henry David Thoreau, *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, Walter Harding and Carl Bode, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 1958) 522; David Heard to Henry David Thoreau, July 1st, 1859. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 7. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library; Jon. A. Hill to Henry David Thoreau, July 25th, 1859. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 7. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library; C.C.Thackford to Henry David Thoreau. N.D. [1859?]. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 7. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library; Thoreau, Henry David. Miscellaneous notes from river survey and statistics on the back of an envelope addressed to “Henry D. Thoreaux.” [1858-1859?]. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 6. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library; Thoreau, Journal, Morgan, June 24, July 14.

¹³⁹ Thoreau, Journal, Morgan, July 5, July 12. He even set up a chart with 45 entries for holes he felt he needed to survey for his employers, and those he surveyed for his own muse. See Henry David Thoreau, “The Deep Holes Above FH Pond.” [1859?]. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 6. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library.

¹⁴⁰ He takes readings of the river’s depth at 6AM, 2PM, and 8PM. Thoreau, Journal, Morgan Library, August 2.

¹⁴¹ In the notes, it is very clear that Thoreau spent much of his effort constructing a deep historical geography of the river, one as thick with human usage as it is taken with the physical characteristics of water. See Henry David Thoreau. Notes on Bridges. N.D. [1858-1859?]. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 6. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library. He also recorded all sorts of things, like the character of the current, and the composition of the river’s bottom, at each bridge – information extraneous to the task he had been hired for. See Henry David Thoreau, Draft of Statistics of the Bridges over Concord River. 1859. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 5. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library. For the final version, see Henry David Thoreau, *Statistics of the Bridges over Concord River, between Heard’s Bridge and Billerica Dam, Obtained June 22nd, 23rd, & 24th 1859; The Level of the Water at Concord in the Meantime, not having Varied One Inch from about 3 Feet Above Summer Level.* 1859. Henry David Thoreau Surveys. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library.

¹⁴² Thoreau, *Journals* 2:1056.

¹⁴³ “I was contending some time ago that our meadows must have been wetter once than they are now, else the trees would have got up there more. I see that Shattuck says under 1654 (page 33), ‘The meadows were somewhat drier, and ceased to be a subject of frequent complaint.’” Thoreau, *Journals* 2: 1118.

¹⁴⁴ Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1485. He also cites the fact that a fordway, which had been used sometime in the distant past, was no longer used because the water was too deep. See Henry David Thoreau, Journal, April 8, 1859-September 21, 1859. Online transcript of manuscript volume 29. http://www.library.ucsb.edu/thoreau/writings_journals29.html, 211. Hereafter referred to as Online Journal. “E. Hosmer, as a proof that the river had been lower than now, says that his father, who was born about the middle of the last century, used to tell of a time, when he was a boy, when the river just below Derby’s Bridge did not run, and he could cross it dry-shod on the rocks, the water standing in pools when Conant’s mill (where the factory now is) was not running. I noticed the place to-day, and, low as the river is for the season, it must be at least a foot and a half deep there.” Thoreau, *Journals* 2:1624-1625. Four months later, Thoreau wrote, “Sam Barrett says that last May he waded across the Assabet River on the old dam in front of his house without going over his India-rubber [sic] boots,

which are sixteen and a half inches high. I do not believe you could have done better than this a hundred years ago, or before the canal dam was built.” Thoreau, *Journals* 2:1689.

¹⁴⁵ Thoreau, *Journals* 1:789.

¹⁴⁶ Thoreau, *Journals* 2:1500.

¹⁴⁷ Thoreau, *Journals* 2:1494.

¹⁴⁸ Thoreau, *Journals* 2:1504. See also Thoreau, Online Journal, 241-247.

¹⁴⁹ Thoreau, *Journals* 2:1011.

¹⁵⁰ Thoreau, *Journals* 2:1587.

¹⁵¹ For a fine, brief analysis of how Thoreau has been coopted by this environmental rhetoric of victim/aggressor, see Jane Bennett, *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003) 80-85. For an academic view which reinforces this dichotomy, while adding a gendered twist to the binary, see Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, William Cronon, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996): 132-159.

¹⁵² Loammie Baldwin, "Plan of Concord River from East Sudbury & Billerica Mills, 22.15 Miles, To be used on a trial in the S.J. Court, Sudbury & East Sudbury Meadow Corporation vs. Middlesex Canal, Taken by agreement of Parties, By L. Baldwin, Civil Engineer. Surveyed & Drawn by B.F. Perham. May 1834," in *Report of the Joint Special Committee*, lxxxv.

¹⁵³ J.B. Harley reminds us that silences are also an active performance. See Harley, *The New Nature of Maps*, 86, 87, 97, 99.

¹⁵⁴ Thoreau, "Huckleberries," 488.

¹⁵⁵ Henry David Thoreau, *The Dispersion of Seeds*, In *Faith in a Seed: The Dispersion of Seeds and Other Late Natural History Writings*, Bradley P. Dean, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993) 104.

¹⁵⁶ Gary Paul Nabhan, "Foreword" to Thoreau, *Faith in a Seed*, xiv; Richardson, *Henry Thoreau*, 383; Daniel B. Botkin, *No Man's Garden: Thoreau and a New Vision for Civilization and Nature* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2001) 33-36; Walls, *Seeing New Worlds*, 189-199.

¹⁵⁷ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, in *From So Simple a Beginning: The Four Great Books of Charles Darwin*. Edward O. Wilson, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006) 488-489. To be fair, Thoreau was influenced by Darwin's military metaphors: "we forget that each species, even where it most abounds, is constantly suffering enormous destruction at some period in its life, from enemies or from competitors for the same place and food, and if these enemies or competitors be in the least degree forwarded by any slight change of climate, they will increase in numbers, and, as each area is already fully stocked with inhabitants, the other species will decrease." Thoreau: "Thus this double forest was advancing to conquer new (or old) lands, the pines sending forward their children on the wings of the wind, while already the oak seedlings from the oak wood beyond had established themselves beneath the pines, preparing to supplant them. The pines are the vanguard – they with their children before them stand up to fire, while the little oaks kneel behind and between them. The pine is the pioneer, the oak the more permanent settler who buys out the other's improvements." See Darwin, *On the Origin* 494; Thoreau, *The Dispersion of Seeds*, 167.

¹⁵⁸ Thoreau, *Dispersion of Seeds*, 130.

¹⁵⁹ Thoreau, *Dispersion of Seeds*, 63-64.

¹⁶⁰ On the back of the Simon Brown's letter requesting him to collect statistics on the town's bridges, the Thoreau had written to himself that he needed to consult a copy of Baldwin's map. Brown to Thoreau. Thoreau, Online Journal, 129-130; He mentions Baldwin's map four more times. See Thoreau, Journal, Morgan, July 10, 12, 14, and 27.

¹⁶¹ Henry David Thoreau, "Names of Bridges on Baldwin's Map of 1811." [1859?]. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 6. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library.

¹⁶² I assume these were made before the middle of July because on a few of them, Thoreau has taken notes on river depth on the 16th and 18th of that month. Henry David Thoreau, Map Tracings. N.D. [1857-1860?] 5 sheets. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 6. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library.

¹⁶³ Thoreau, *Journals* 2:1009.

¹⁶⁴ Cavell writes, “To realize where we are and what we are living for, the conditions of our present, the angle at which we stand to the world [notice Cavell’s slide into surveying analogies], the writer calls ‘improving the time,’ using a preacher’s phrase and giving his kind of turn to it. No one’s occasions are exactly those of another, but our conditions of improvement are the same, especially our outsideness and, hence, the world’s presence to us. And our conditions are to be realized within each calling, whatever that happens to be.” Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 61. Thoreau, *Journals* 1:932.

¹⁶⁵ “In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time...to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and the future, which is precisely the present moment.” Thoreau, *Walden*, 336.

¹⁶⁶ Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1010.

¹⁶⁷ I’m not sure we will ever know exactly when Thoreau made his map, but I can confidently argue that he drafted it in or after July, 1859. Throughout July he is taking the measurements of the river’s depth that appear in his map, and on July 7, he wrote: “But, though meandering, it is straighter in its general course than would be believed. These nearly twenty-three miles in length (or 16+ direct) are contained within a breadth of two miles twenty-six rods; *i.e.*, so much it takes to meander in. It can be plotted by the scale of one thousand feet to an inch on a sheet of paper seven feet one and one quarter inches long by eleven inches wide.” The dimensions of that sheet of paper are very nearly the dimensions of his finished map (7’7”x15”). Thoreau, “July 4th”; *Journal*, 2:1488.

¹⁶⁸ Thoreau, River Survey.

¹⁶⁹ Thoreau, River Survey.

¹⁷⁰ Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, 91; James Corner, “The Agency of Mapping,” in *Mappings*, edited by Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd., 1999) 216; Hessler, “From Ortelius to Champlain,” 4, 12.

¹⁷¹ D. Graham Burnett, in his powerful *Masters of All They Surveyed*, writes that metalepsis—the process of using the past to legitimate the present, while at the same time erasing the past’s hold on the present—is one of the key devices at work in surveying. Maps depend for their power on their claim to ahistoricity. The whole game of surveying turns into a charade if the map admits that it is only one in a long line of other maps, none of which have been exact as their scales lead us to believe. And thus, history undercuts the map’s autocratic authority. He also notes that one of the greatest legacies of 18th and 19th-century Western colonialism is a very specific way of thinking about space, about ownership, about who and what are worth pointing out, are worth belonging. See Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed*, 22, 39, 47.

¹⁷² Thoreau, River Survey; Davies, *Elements of Surveying*, 51.

¹⁷³ I’ve borrowed the term “deep map” from William Least Heat-Moon, and it indicates a knowledge that begins with simple cartography to make connections to culture, environment, class, economics – indeed, attempts a mapping that is inclusive precisely because it transgresses boundaries. Luria calls it a “deep focus shot” of the River and its human cultural. See William Least Heat-Moon, *PrairieErth (a deep map)* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991); Luria, “Thoreau’s Geopoetics,” 135.

¹⁷⁴ In a similar vein, Laura Dassow Walls has argued that Thoreau’s scientific gaze sought consilience, “the murmur of multiple voices and actions,” rather than neatly separate, cleanly divisible truths. See her wonderful *Seeing New Worlds*, 13, 126, 132, 169, 251.

¹⁷⁵ David Nye notes that many counter-modern narratives take as their founding presupposition that the land is not empty, but already claimed. Nye, *America as Second Creation*, 292, 294. See also Peter Blakemore’s excellent article, “Reading Home: Thoreau, Literature, and the Phenomenon of Inhabitation,” in *Thoreau’s Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing*, Richard J. Schneider, ed. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 119.

¹⁷⁶ Thoreau, *Walden*, 395.

¹⁷⁷ William Ellery Channing to Henry David Thoreau. N.D. [1859?]. MS. Henry David Thoreau Papers 1836-1862, Vault A35, Thoreau, Unit 1, Box 1, Folder 7. The William Monroe Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library.

¹⁷⁸ Thoreau, River Survey. Luria argues—and I would agree—that this is one of the places that Thoreau denies the universal pretensions of surveying by actively writing himself—in the use of that first-person “my”—into his map’s text, a bit of first-person subjectivity as uncomfortable among scientists as it is amongst academics, and for similar reasons. Luria, “Thoreau’s Geopoetics,” 135.

¹⁷⁹ In a joyful spirit of boundary crossing, Rebecca Solnit writes, “on foot, everything stays connected, for while walking, one occupies the spaces between those interiors in the same way one occupies those interiors. One lives in the whole world rather than in interiors built up against it.” Similarly, Michel de Certeau writes that “A different world (the reader’s) slips into the author’s place. This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It

transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient." Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay*, like *Wanderlust* and *The Practice of Everyday Life* explores the possibilities of place making, of boundary making. He notes that borders can actually be sites for opportunities, that they tend to invite their own abrogation, and are necessary for a sense of belonging, a sense of place: "for home does not shut out the forest, but transforms it into a cultural object, a wildness into a kind of beauty." Along with Solnit's *Savage Dreams* and Robert Pogue Harrison's *Forests*, these five books form the background for this section, and I could cite them at the end of every sentence. I'll not do that, and rather acknowledge them here, citing them only when I pull something specific from their texts. See Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000) 9; Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xxi; Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 137, 155, 157.

¹⁸⁰ Thoreau, *Journal*, 2:1496.

¹⁸¹ "Liquidity is, in my opinion, the very desire of language. Language needs to flow. It flows naturally. Its clashing, its ruggedness, its harshness are its more artificial efforts, those that are more difficult to *render natural*." This comes from a poetic meditation of the voice of water, Gaston Bachelard's, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas: The Pegasus Foundation, 1983), especially the conclusion, "Water's Voice," 187.

¹⁸² Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 533.

¹⁸³ Thoreau, *Journal*, 1:457.

¹⁸⁴ Thoreau, *Journal*, 1:324; "But our wild apple is wild perchance like myself, who belong not to the aboriginal race here, but have strayed into the woods from the cultivated stock, – where the birds, where winged thoughts or agents, have planted or are planting me. Even these at length furnish hardy stocks for the orchard." Thoreau, *Journal* 1:197.

¹⁸⁵ Thoreau, *Journal*, 1:419.

¹⁸⁶ Thoreau, *Walking*, 230.

¹⁸⁷ Thoreau, *Dispersion of Seeds*, 60. For many examples of the failure of what he terms "high modernism," see James Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.

¹⁸⁸ Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, 95. This was an engrossing passion for Thoreau, and the eleventh post in his journal reads, "My desire is to know *what* I have lived, that I may know *how* to live henceforth." Thoreau, *Journal* 1:20.

¹⁸⁹ Hugh Raffles, in his wonderful *In Amazonia* – itself a book about how rivers spill over neatly defined borders, writes that, "not even locality is contained within spatial borders." This is an important contribution coming from cultural geographers like Doreen Massey, and I do think that it is a point Thoreau makes as well. See Hugh Raffles, *In Amazonia: A Natural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 190; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) 117, 120, 154, *passim*.

¹⁹⁰ Eric Wilson writes that Thoreau "wished to embody the pulsations of the world," and if that's true, then surveying was one of the prime methods by which he went about his task. And Patrick Chura notes that "the final stages of Thoreau's active life evince not less but more commitment to land surveying, along with a qualitative difference in his feelings about his work." Finally, Sarah Luria's work on Thoreau powerfully makes the case for reading his River Survey and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* alongside each other. Wilson, *Romantic Turbulence*, 96; Chura, *Thoreau the Land Surveyor*, 154; Luria, "Thoreau's Geopoetics."

¹⁹¹ Much of the recent work on Thoreau makes just this point: that distancing can lead to sympathy, that strangeness can be tinged with connection. If we often take our local landscape for granted, what better way to remind ourselves of their wonder than to force ourselves to look at them anew. See, for instance, Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, xv, 5, 11, 47, *passim*; Bennett, *Thoreau's Nature*, xxix, 3, 5, 13, *passim*; Shannon L. Mariotti, *Thoreau's Democratic Withdrawal: Alienation, Participation, and Modernity* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2010) xii, 14, 17, *passim*; Rick Van Noy, *Surveying the Interior*, 45, 66.

¹⁹² Thoreau, *Journal*, 2:1013.

¹⁹³ In his brilliant *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, Harrison writes that, "It is only in our relation to what we are not that what we are may finally become the ground of our dwelling. Nature is where we go to get lost, so that we may find again that which in us is irrevocable." It's this sense of difference that the current environmental historians' obsession with debunking the nature/culture divide glosses over. Harrison is emphatically *not* arguing that nature and culture are diametrically opposite things, but dialectically intertwined, each giving meaning to the other through their differences. Perhaps the overemphasis on materialism that characterizes much environmental history – the sort of materialism which holds that plastic is every bit as natural as a tree because both come from the earth, or that a damned river is no less natural than a free-flowing one because rivers have always been used – seems to miss the cultural point that these places *feel* different, their cultural meaning has been lost even if materially related. And that difference is important. Again, Harrison: "I...realized that the forest, in its enduring antiquity, was

the correlate of the poet's memory, and that once its remnants were gone, the poet would fall into oblivion." Harrison, *Forests*, xi, 227.

¹⁹⁴ Thoreau, *Journals*, 1:466.

¹⁹⁵ Thoreau, *Walden*, 336.

¹⁹⁶ Thoreau, *Journals* 1:481.

¹⁹⁷ Thoreau, "Huckleberries," 496.

¹⁹⁸ Thoreau, *Journal*, 1:539. Anne Baker notes that "Thoreau adapts the process of measurement to his own ends, transforming it into a means of resisting the nationalist and commercial agendas that surveying served." And though Baker focuses on the mapping of the pond that occurs in *Walden*, her conclusions also hold for Thoreau's actual maps. This project is not so different from the one Foucault labels the heterotopic, in which heterotopias, like mirrors, are spaces which make "the place I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through the virtual point which is over there." Or again, the role of the heterotopia can be "to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory." As is characteristic of Foucault, he leaves matters there: *everything* is an illusion to be deconstructed. But he fails to take the next step, the one that David Harvey (as well as Thoreau) urges on us: not all representations are equally good. And if heterotopias can impact our material world (as well as our political, cultural, and economic ones as well), then it is worth examining the values implicit in these heterotopias, constructing imagined spaces that will reinforce the creation of healthful, honorable places. See Baker, *Heartless Immensity*, 48; Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, 1 (Spring, 1986) 24, 27.

¹⁹⁹ Thoreau, "Walking," 254-255.

NOTES TO PART 2

¹ Joseph Bruchac, "At the End of Ridge Road: From a Nature Journal," in Alison H. Deming and Lauret E. Savoy, eds., *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2002) 50.

² On the marketing of the outdoors, see Jennifer Price's excellent chapter 4, "Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the Nature Company," in *Flight Maps*, 167-206 (this chapter also appeared under the same name as a stand-alone essay in Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, 186-203).

³ Barbara McMartin, *The Great Forest of the Adirondacks* (Utica: North Country Books, 1994) 7-14. There's a decently sized corpus of scholarship on the Adirondacks, though it's mostly devoted to political and legal histories of the Adirondack Park. Curiously, there aren't that many works of environmental history, and even fewer cultural histories; the ones that do exist likewise tend to focus heavily on the creation of the of the Park and the history of how the "forever wild" clause came to be written into the New York State Constitution. Historical scholarship on the region was fairly spotty until the 1990s, when there was a relative explosion of work, driven by the increased popularity of environmental history. Alfred W. Donaldson's two volume *A History of the Adirondacks*, published in 1921, is widely considered to be the first scholarly history of the region. Frank Graham, Jr.'s *The Adirondack Park* (1978) is a legal and political history of incorporation, written by a wilderness enthusiast. Philip G. Terrie is probably the foremost Adirondack historian. His *Forever Wild: A Cultural History of Wilderness in the Adirondacks* (1994) is very clearly written in a Roderick Frazier Nash, triumph of wilderness, cultural and intellectual history vein, which makes his *Contested Terrain: A History of Nature and People in the Adirondacks* (1997) all the more remarkable, for *Contested Terrain* is a complete revision—one might almost call it a disavowal—of *Forever Wild*. It's much more of a social history, written according to the new, post-"The Trouble With Wilderness" paradigm, and insists on a declensionist story in which the triumph of wilderness has meant the erasure of the "real" Adirondacks—the inhabited landscape. Paul Schneider's *The Adirondacks: A History of America's First Wilderness* (1997) is probably the most nuanced, holistic, suggestive work on the region, and innovatively mixes history and first-person travel narrative. Caroline Mastin Welsh has edited a collection of essays entitled, *Adirondack Prints and Printmakers: The Call of the Wild* (1998) which is crucial for approaching the visual culture of the region, along with Georgia Barnhill's *Wild Impressions: The Adirondacks on Paper: Prints in the Collection of the Adirondack Museum*, from 1995. Karl Jacoby devotes his excellent Part I, "Forest: The Adirondacks," of his *Crimes Against Nature* (2001) to a post-structuralist, James-Scott-and-Ramachandra-Guha-influenced exposure of the contentious power relationships surrounding elite foresters, Romantics, State agencies and locals. It's important to note, though, that Jacoby's theoretical and methodological commitments only really begin to fit the history of the Adirondacks after the Forest Preserve (precursor to the Park) is created in 1885, and so Jacoby spends very little time on the history of the Adirondacks that makes up the bulk of my chapter. Stephen B. Sulavik's *Adirondack: Of Indians and*

Mountains, 1535-1838 (2005) is a quirky, beautifully illustrated, at times wonderful investigation of where the name “Adirondack” came from and how it was applied to the land. It’s also one of the few sources that doesn’t always anticipate the creation of the Park, and in fact ends precisely when most histories begin. Though it’s not really focused on the Adirondacks, David Stradling’s *The Nature of New York* is a wonderful synthetic account of the role that nature has played in the Empire state. From Central Park west to Niagara Falls, from the Catskills to the Adirondacks, “New Yorkers identified the Empire State with the landscape it contained.” See Alfred L. Donaldson, *A History of the Adirondacks*, 2 vols. (1921. Reprint, Fleischmanns: Purple Mountain Press, 1996); Frank Graham, Jr., *The Adirondack Park: A Political History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1978); Philip G. Terrie, *Forever Wild: A Cultural History of Wilderness in the Adirondacks* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994) and *Contested Terrain: A New History of Nature and People in the Adirondacks* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Caroline Mastin Welsh, ed., *Adirondack Prints and Printmakers: The Call of the Wild* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998); Georgia B. Barnhill, *Wild Impression: The Adirondacks on Paper: Prints in the Collection of the Adirondack Museum* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1995); Paul Schneider, *The Adirondacks: A History of America’s First Wilderness* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997); Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*; and Stephen B. Sulavik’s *Adirondack: Of Indians and Mountains, 1535-1838* (Fleischmanns: Purple Mountain Press, 2005); David Stradling, *The Nature of New York: An Environmental History of the Empire State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010) 105.

⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Adirondacs” in *May-Day and Other Pieces* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1881) 43.

⁵ Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1344.

⁶ Donaldson, *A History of the Adirondacks*, 1:177; Graham, Jr., *The Adirondack Park*, 20.

⁷ Emerson, “The Adirondacs,” 45, 46.

⁸ Emerson, “The Adirondacs,” 47.

⁹ Emerson, “The Adirondacs,” 47, 48-49, 52, 55, 57-58, 60-61.

¹⁰ This is Philip G. Terrie’s reading of “The Adirondacs,” and one of the standard ways that Transcendentalists and Romantics have been traditionally dismissed according to a Roderick Frazier Nash wilderness paradigm. Terrie, to his credit, distinguishes between a “popular” and “complex” romanticism, in much the same way that Leo Marx makes his classic distinction between sentimental and complex pastoralism. See Terrie, *Forever Wild*, 63; Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*.

¹¹ This is the more recent, post-“The Trouble With Wilderness” reading, typified by Terrie’s *Contested Terrain* and Jacoby’s *Crimes Against Nature*.

¹² Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 236, 242.

¹³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Fugitive Slave Law*, in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Mary Oliver, ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 2000) 779, 780. Emerson had spoken even earlier on the Fugitive Slave Law, in 1851, and Emerson had said then, “it is not possible to extricate oneself from the questions in which your age is involved.... The last year has forced us all into politics.” Quoted in Richardson, Jr., *Emerson*, 496.

¹⁴ Richardson, *Emerson*, 497-498, 545; Harding, *Days of Henry Thoreau*, 415-416. Not to be outdone, Thoreau, too, would give public lectures on Brown, which were some of the most well-attended events he ever gave.

¹⁵ Not much has been written about this facet of Adirondack, environmental, abolitionist, and African American history. Donaldson gives a very brief sketch—but he’s mostly concerned with the settlement only as it relates to John Brown, and he’s very quick to write the whole thing off as a delusion. Frothingham narrates a brief history of Smith’s donation, but it’s clear that he has no idea what to make of the experiment, except to say that the land grants were a testimony to Smith’s humanitarian commitments. Harlow is even more perplexed, and understands the experiment as just one more example of Smith’s soft-headed egocentrism. David S. Reynolds, like Donaldson, is only interested in the Adirondacks insofar as they are useful for showing John Brown’s radicalism, and is hampered by small factual errors (“Gerrit Smith...had bought the North Elba land because he realized that a settlement of blacks would not be welcomed close to mainstream communities,” but it was Peter who bought the land, for speculation. Gerrit inherited it). Sernett devotes a handful of pages, but again it’s only interesting to him because John Brown was there, and he’s generally dismissive of anything that carries even a whiff of utopianism. Stauffer devotes a chapter to the Adirondacks, and in many ways it is the crucial pivot chapter in his book. He’s the academic who treats the experiment most seriously, as something worth studying closely, and his work is a good starting place for anyone interested in the subject (though it can be, at times, hamstrung by Stauffer’s self contradictions: he asserts both that Smith never called his grant Timbuctoo, and, later, that he often referred to the colony as

Timbuctoo). Katherine Butler Jones's "They Called it Timbuctoo," is an excellent, haunting exploration of personal roots that, unbeknownst to her, grew through rocky Adirondack soil. She's the great-granddaughter of Hannah and Edward Weeks, the recipient of one of Smith's plots. Amy Godine is the acknowledged expert on the entire Essex and Franklin County settlements, and she curated an excellent exhibition called "Dreaming of Timbuctoo," conceived and produced by Martha Swan, in 2000. Godine is currently at work on a manuscript that promises to be the first thoroughly researched exploration of Timbuctoo. In 2001, Godine published an article in *Adirondack Life*, which, like the exhibition, placed the entire experiment in a suffrage narrative. Also, there is a .pdf of the exhibition, available at <http://adkhistorycenter.org/edu/dot.html>. See Donaldson, *A History of the Adirondacks*, 3-12; Frothingham, *Gerrit Smith*, 101-113; Harlow, *Gerrit Smith*, 242-252; David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005) 125-132; Sernett, *North Star Country*, especially chapter 8, "John Brown's Body," 195-221; Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, especially chapter 5, "Bible Politics and the Creation of the Alliance," 134-181; Katherine Butler Jones, "They Called it Timbuctoo," *Orion* 17, 1 (Winter, 1998): 27-33; Amy Godine, "Forty Acres and a Vote," *Adirondack Life* 33, 6 (September/October, 2001): 46-53.

¹⁶ I've been debating with myself since 2001 how to refer to the settlers. It seems that many of them referred to themselves as "grantees," and, indeed, the word shows up often in the pages of *The North Star*, and in communications from Gerrit Smith's black agents to the recipients of his land. But "grantee," it seems to me, puts all of the agency on Smith, puts the black New Yorkers in a passive position of simply receiving a gift. It ignores the tremendous amount of work and sacrifice that came with moving to and settling upon Smith's lands. For this reason, I've decided on a phrase that is no less problematical: "pioneers." James McCune Smith calls a number of the settlers by this name, and he does it in full knowledge of its cultural overtones. I do the same. See James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, July 7, 1848, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 34, Smith, James McCune Incoming Corres. Folder; Rev. Theodore S. Wright, Rev. Charles B. Ray, Dr. J. M'Cune Smith, *An Address to the Three Thousand Colored Citizens of New-York, Who are the Owners of One Hundred and Twenty Thousand Acres of Land in the State of New York, Given to Them by Gerrit Smith, Esq., of Peterboro* (New York: n.p., 1846) 5.

¹⁷ I'm leaning heavily here, and throughout this chapter, on some of the suggestions Conevery Bolton Valenčius offers in her *The Health of the Country*, perhaps most importantly the insight that human body and landscape were understood to be directly, intimately linked. Valenčius shows that "the geography of health" points to a "surprising holism in the worldview of the bustling, rapidly industrializing nineteenth century," that nineteenth century Americans were much more environmentally conscious (and conscious in a way that we, in the U.S. may no longer be capable of) than many current scholars give them credit for. I think her thesis can be a solid foundation for work, such as mine, that seeks to show how certain landscape ideologies were actively deployed *against* a stultifying definition of modernity. I also think that *The Health of the Country* is the perfect jumping-off point that illustrates how the beginning of a black environmental historiography is sending up shoots. But because of its relative newness it is still a two-branched sapling (with a few notable exceptions): agricultural histories of the antebellum South (as in Valenčius), or framed-by-environmental-racism histories of the twentieth-century urban North. See Conevery Bolton Valenčius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) 3; Andrew Hurley *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Mart A. Stewart, "What Nature Suffers to Groe": *Life, Labor and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680-1920* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996); Giovanna Da Chiro, "Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice." In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, William Cronon, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996); Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Alison H. Deming and Lauret E. Savoy, eds. *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2002); Elizabeth D. Blum, "Power, Danger, and Control: Slave Women's Perceptions of Wilderness in the Nineteenth Century," *Women's Studies* 31 (2002): 247-265; Nicolas W. Proctor, *Bathed in Blood: Hunting and Mastery in the Old South* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002); Carolyn Merchant, "Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History," *Environmental History* 8 (July, 2003): 380-394; Dianne D. Glave, "A Garden So Brilliant with Colors, So Original in its Design: Rural African American Women, Gardening, Progressive Reform, and the Foundation of an African American Environmental Perspective," *Environmental History* 8 (July, 2003): 395-411; Dianne D. Glave, and Mark Stoll, eds., *To Love the Wind and Rain: African Americans and Environmental History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006); Dianne D. Glave, *Rooted in the Earth: Reclaiming the African American Environmental*

Heritage (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010); Kimberly K. Smith, *African American Environmental Thought: Foundations* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007) and Matthew Klinge's review of *African American Environmental Thought*, "Green Like Me?" *Reviews in American History* 36 (2008): 294-302; Kimberly K. Smith, "What Is Africa to Me?: Wilderness in Black Thought, 1860-1930," in *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate*. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008); Cassandra Y. Johnson and J.M. Bowker, "African-American Wildland Memories," in *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate*. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008); Camille T. Dungy, ed., *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009); Kimberly N. Ruffin, *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010). Thankfully, the newest entrance into the canonical works of environmental history, Mark Fiege's *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012) has two hefty chapters devoted to African Americans: one is on antebellum southern agriculture, and the other focuses on twentieth-century urban environmental racism. The lone exception, as far as I'm aware, to the southern antebellum/northern, urban, post-war historiography is Myra B. Young Armstead's *Freedom's Gardner: James F. Brown, Horticulture, and the Hudson Valley in Antebellum America* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

¹⁸ In fact pioneers, white as well as black, tended to settle communally. Life was too hard, too tenuous otherwise. See Faragher's *Sugar Creek* for a good example.

¹⁹ The difficulty in trying to say for sure whether the community—or even the whole area represented in Smith's grants—was known as Timbuctoo is that, as far as I've been able to determine, there are only four primary source references to Timbuctoo, three from John Brown (and, for reasons that I'll discuss later, I'm not sure that Brown's name for the colony was a name that it would have used itself), and one from the pioneer, James H. Henderson, who addressed a letter to Henry Highland Garnet from "West Keene Timbuctoo." And yet, there *was* a strong and well-documented tradition of African-Americans invoking Africa in their cultural production. And so even though Timbuctoo may be more fantasy than real, I'll refer to the area as the black settlers referred to it: North Elba, Blacksville, or Timbuctoo for the specific settlements, Essex and Franklin Counties or the Adirondacks when talking about the whole region. I *will* avoid calling them "Smith's lands," as the settlers often did, because in my view, once Smith deeded them to others, his role in the experiment was largely secondary. Finally, in 2009, a professor of archaeology from SUNY Potsdam named Hadley Kruczek-Aaron began excavating the plot of Lyman Epps, one of the pioneers who stayed in the Adirondacks for the rest of his life. She has not yet published anything, though her findings will hold great promise. See the series of letters Brown wrote to Willis A. Hodges, founder of Blacksville, published under "John Brown in Essex County," *Evening Post*, December 20, 1859; "Mr. Waite J. Lewis and the Smith's Lands," *The North Star*, February 16, 1849.

²⁰ *The North Star* ran an article in 1849, which indicated that many local whites saw black consociation as a source of unfortunate strength, that if the black pioneers would only rely on themselves as individuals they could be starved out "and the land would be settled by whites." And Donaldson writes, "The farms allotted to the negroes consisted of forty acres each, but the natural gregariousness of the race tended to defeat the purpose of these individual holdings. The darkies began to build their shanties in one place, instead of on their separate grants. Before long about ten families had huddled their houses together down by the brook, not far from where the White Church now stands. The shanties were square, crudely built of logs, with flat roofs, out of which little stovepipes protruded at varying angles. The last touch of pure negroism was a large but dilapidated red flag that floated above the settlement, bearing the half-humorous-half-pathetic legend "Timbuctoo"—a name that was applied to the whole vicinity for several years." I do want to emphasize that Donaldson cites no sources, and that, in his distaste for the black settlers, reaches for any club, however exaggerated, with which to club them. The flag anecdote, for instance, may very well be a pure invention—but I like it: the red flag of socialism, with the name of an African empire, flying over the community fits my story as well as Donaldson's. "From the Northern Star and Colored Farmer," *The North Star*, February 2, 1849; Donaldson, *A History of the Adirondacks*, 2:6.

²¹ For more on "abolitionist geography," see LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies*, 177-188, and LeMenager, "Marginal Landscape: Revolutionary Abolitionists and Environmental Imagination," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 7,1 (Fall, 2005): 49-56.

²² Donaldson, *A History of the Adirondacks*, 2:6.

²³ Donaldson, *A History of the Adirondacks*, 1:346-347.

²⁴ Schneider, *The Adirondacks*, 31; Terrie, *Forever Wild*, 19.

²⁵ Harry Fenn, "Source of the Hudson," in William Cullen Bryant, ed., *Picturesque America; or, The Land We Live In. A Delineation by Pen and Pencil of The Mountains, Rivers, Lakes, Forests, Waterfalls, Shores, Cañons, Valleys, Cities, and Other Picturesque Features of Our Country* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1872) 2:433.

²⁶ Sulavik, *Adirondack* 17, 92-93.

²⁷ Ebenezer Emmons, *Geology of New-York*, part 2 (Albany: W. & A. White & J. Vischer, 1842) 10-11.

²⁸ Sulavik, *Adirondack* 93.

²⁹ Sulavik, *Adirondack* 13, 36, 38

³⁰ The historical literature, stretching back 400 years, speaks nearly in unison on this point. Indeed, to this day there's almost no recent historical or archaeological scholarship on the region. But this will change, indeed it is, and the "empty land" narrative is being contested by Melissa Otis, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Toronto. She's currently finishing her dissertation, entitled "'Location of Exchange': A History of Algonquian and Iroquoian Peoples in the Adirondacks, 1776 – 1920" and in it she argues that the Adirondacks have always been an indigenous homeland for Algonquian and Iroquoian-speaking peoples. Before contact with Europeans, the Adirondacks were a place of resources, and labor for Iroquoian and Algonquian people; after contact, they became a refuge from the eighteenth-century geopolitical destabilization caused by white contact, as well as a source of capital, in the form of beaver skins. While the Adirondacks may never have been "settled," they weren't empty, but a sort of contested commons, and Otis argues that we need to rethink what counts as claimed land. Melissa Otis, e-mail message to author, January 11, 2012; March 27, 2013; Sylvester, *Historical Sketches of Northern New York*, 13

³¹ Charles Fenno Hoffman, one of the earliest promoters of Adirondack adventure wrote, "And when this remnant of the Iroquois shall have dwindled from among us, their names will still live in the majestic lakes and noble rivers that embalm the memory of their language." C.F. Hoffman, *Wild Scenes in the Forest and Prairie* (London: Richard Bentley, 1839) 2:5.

³² For a good cartographic history of the Adirondacks, see Jerold Pepper, "When Men and Mountains Meet: Mapping the Adirondacks," in Caroline Mastin Welsh, ed., *Adirondack Prints and Printmakers: The Call of the Wild* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998) 1-24.

³³ H.C. Carey, "Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Map of New York," in *A Complete Historical, Chronological, and Geographical American Atlas* (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey & I. Lea, 1823).

³⁴ Homer D.L. Sweet, *Twilight Hours in the Adirondacks: The Daily Doings and Several Sayings of Seven Sober, Social, Scientific Students in the Great Wilderness of Northern New York* (Syracuse: Wynkoops & Leonard, 1870) lines 295-312.

³⁵ In 2008, the McCormick family, which had owned the pond since the 1950s, sold the land to the Nature Conservancy with the hope that the Conservancy and the State would eventually come to agreement as to how to best incorporate the pond into the State's public lands. "Press Release: Nature Conservancy Purchases Follensby Pond in the Adirondacks," *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, September 18, 2008.

³⁶ W.J. Stillman, *The Autobiography of a Journalist* (London: Grant Richards, 1901) 1:176.

³⁷ Schneider, *The Adirondacks*, 105-106; Nathaniel Sylvester, *Historical Sketches of Northern New York and the Adirondack Wilderness* (1877; repr., Fleischmanns: Hatbor Hill Books, 1997) 152-165.

³⁸ Schneider, *The Adirondacks*, 87-88, 93-96. For a much more detailed account of the John Brown Tract, which has a long and strange history, see Henry A.L. Brown and Richard J. Walton, *John Brown's Tract: Lost Adirondack Empire* (Canaan, NH: Phoenix Publishing, 1988). Brown University is named not just for John, but for the Brown family in general, who had been early supporters of the institution.

³⁹ The phrase "ecology of freedom" comes from Murray Bookchin, an anarchist who founded and propounded, perhaps most clearly in his *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*, a school of thought known as social ecology. When Bookchin writes of ecology, he's not referring to what happens in university ecology departments, but something more holistic, something that includes humanity: "By 'social ecology,' I therefore mean ecology as the dialectical *unfolding* of life-forms from the simple to the complex, or more precisely, from the simple to the diverse.... What seems very clear is that without complexity, there cannot be diversity. Thus a tendency toward diversity is indispensable to the emergence of our rich cosmos of life-forms—a cosmos that makes up the multitude of 'selections' in the geological, biotic, and even subjective universe in which we live. This cosmos also makes up the *human-made* universe, or the 'second-nature' we are imposing on nonhuman evolution, or 'first nature.'" *Everything* that lives, and everything that supports life, is involved in an ecological relationship, Bookchin argues. There's great diversity in ecology—amoebas and apes—but there's no hierarchy: amoebas are not higher or lower, just unique. All of life, Bookchin argues, is organized toward ever-increasing complexity. The point of social ecology, of the ecology of freedom, is to transform "both nonhuman and human-made natures into a more complete

nature that is conscious, thinking, and purposeful. This *thinking* nature is ethical and rational, not simply physiological and biochemical, and humanity is the most recent attribute among the many that evolution added over at least two billion years of organic development.... Social ecology...is a concept of an ever-developing universe, indeed a vast process of achieving *wholeness*...by means of unity in diversity, with creative potentialities that thematically intertwine two *legacies* of traditions: a legacy of freedom and a legacy of domination. These legacies interact to expand independently and interdependently the landscape of freedom and domination.” We could take issue with this all of this, but what he’s articulating is a vision as old as ecology itself—Darwin’s “from so simple a beginning, endless forms most beautiful”—a unity in diversity extended to society. And so simplification—of the natural world, of human culture and society—is anti-natural, contributes to the poverty of our surroundings and ourselves, equally. Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 10-11, 72, 98, 109, 213; Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 760.

⁴⁰ It’s hard to find good biographical information on Gerrit Smith—there are only a few published biographies, two of them dated from the first years of the nineteenth-century—largely because his handwriting was nearly unreadable. Whole pages of his manuscript papers were taken up by simple scribbles. I’ve relied on transcendentalist O.B. Frothingham’s edition, despite its overly triumphant tone, as well as Ralph Harlow’s, despite its generally sarcastic and negative one. I’ve also relied heavily on John Stauffer’s *The Black Hearts of Men*, and, though not a biography of Smith, it is one of the most nuanced, as well as the most recent, treatments of the man. Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Gerrit Smith: A Biography* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1909) 6-7, 21-22; Ralph Volney Harlow, *Gerrit Smith: Philanthropist and Reformer* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1939); John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁴¹ There were, of course, other, more moderate abolitionists, like those who belonged to the American Colonization Society, a group which, in the words of Lewis Perry, “most successfully blending dislike of slavery with fear of free Negroes.” And to make it more confusing, there was a political party—founded in 1855 by, among other, Gerrit Smith—called the Radical Abolitionist Party, a party that explicitly embraced violence to end slavery. I’m not concerned with the conservative abolitionists in this chapter, who Perry defines as those who saw slavery as a southern institution afflicting African Americans, and I’ll only discuss the violent abolitionists at the end. From now on, when I refer to abolitionism, I mean the radical, immediatist variety, which sought to perfect society by ridding it of *all* slavery. Perry, *Radical Abolitionism*, 9, 11, 16-17; Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 8.

⁴² Murray Bookchin notes that, “From the late Roman world to the Enlightenment, every significant radical idea was cast in terms of Christian doctrine.” It’s an overstatement, of course, even if limited to the West, but it’s not much of one. See Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 250.

⁴³ Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), xi, 39-46; Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 4; Gerrit Smith, “Gerrit Smith’s Constitutional Argument,” *The Liberty Tree* (Chicago) November 1, 1844.

⁴⁴ Perry points out that there were no self-identified anarchists in the abolition movement: indeed, the abolitionists all fought *against* anarchy, which they attributed to slaveholders, large landholders, and politicians, generally, or those who flouted the only true law and substituted their own. Still, even if they didn’t describe themselves as anarchists, their basic tenet, that one human’s domination of another was inherently wrong in all cases is one of the foundations of anarchist thought. Harlow, *Gerrit Smith*, 137-147; Frothingham, 181-191; Perry, *Radical Abolitionism*, x, and especially chapter 3, “Nonresistant Anarchism and Antislavery,” 55-91, and chapter 6, “The Politics of Anarchy,” 158-187. For a brief description of abolitionist politics in New York, see Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) 202, 210-211, 220-221.

⁴⁵ In 1853, Smith ran as an Independent for Congress, and won, but resigned in August, 1854, because he has other, more potentially productive plans, and grew tired of the Congressional quagmire. Perry, *Radical Abolitionism*, 184-185. For a good narrative of the Liberty Party, see Milton C. Sernett, *North Star Country: Upstate New York and the Crusade for African American Freedom* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002) especially chapter 5, “Bible Politics,” 104-128. For a very good description of abolitionism in mainstream politics, including the radical Democrats, the Free Soil Party, and the Liberty Party and Liberty League, see Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery & the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ There was an outcry amongst customers who had bought land from Peter Smith: catching wind of Gerrit Smith’s financial mess, they began to question the veracity of their titles. To quell the murmurs of economic treachery, the younger Smith went to the lengths of publishing a lengthy broadside in 1844. See Gerrit Smith, *To the Persons Who*

Derive Title From Myself or My Late Father to Land in Charlotte River and Byrne's Tracts, in the Counties of Delaware, Otsego, and Schoharie, 5/24/1844. Gerrit Smith Broadside Collection, Syracuse University.

⁴⁷ Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 136. For more on Evans, one of the key radical northern Democrats marrying abolitionism to land reform, see Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 13, and especially chapters 1, "Dissident Democrats in the 1830s," and 2, "Set Down Your Feet, Democrats," 17-77.

⁴⁸ The whole exchange (George H. Evans, "To Gerrit Smith"; Gerrit Smith, "Gerrit Smith's Reply"; and Evans, "Rejoinder to Gerrit Smith") can be found in *People's Rights*, July 24, 1844.

⁴⁹ Clearly part of Smith's goal was to combat poverty in its very widest sense. Leslie Harris misses this when she argues that, "The radical abolitionists were never as concerned with the material condition of northern free blacks as black people would have liked. White radical abolitionists never consistently funded programs or institutions to address the poverty of free blacks in New York City, or in the North generally." Hers is a long string of emphatic statements, hamstrung by the relatively narrow historical view she takes. Focusing on "wilderness areas," on regions typically outside the purview of African America history, yields surprising results. Smith's land was in Franklin, Essex, Hamilton, Fulton, Oneida, Delaware, Madison, and Ulster counties. Today, all of Essex and Hamilton counties are part of the Adirondack Park, as well as parts of Franklin, Fulton, and Oneida. Delaware County is in the south of the state, bordering Pennsylvania; Madison is Smith's home county, in central New York, and Ulster is along the Hudson, in the eastern part of the state. But by far the majority of land was given away in the "Old Military Tract" in Essex and Franklin counties, as is evident in the pages of Smith record of the land he gave away, "Distribution of Lands to Colored Men; Begun in 1846." Smith would also pay the cost drawing up and delivering the deed. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 135; Rev. Theodore S. Wright, *An Address to the Three Thousand*, 7, back page; Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 138; "Distribution of Lands to Colored Men; Begun in 1846," Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, vol. 88.

⁵⁰ "Correspondence," *The North Star*, January 7, 1848.

⁵¹ Old Military Tract, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 98, Description of Lots and Acreage Books Folder, vol. 47 d.

⁵² Smith also set out to form another black utopian community in Western New York, near the town of Florence. By 1849 and 1850, he also resolved to give land away to over 1000 needy white residents of New York, as well. Most of the land was not in the Adirondacks, however, and was of lesser quality: "My gifts to colored people took all my large tracts of farming land, save one in the County of Franklin," he had written in 1850. "A New Settlement," *The North Star*, December 22, 1848; "Florence Settlement," *The North Star*, February 23, 1849; "New Bedford, March 22, 1848" *The North Star*, March 30, 1849; Wright, et. al, *An Address to the Three Thousand*, 7, 8 9; Gerrit Smith to John Cochrane, Isaac T. Hopper, Daniel C. Eaton, George H. Evans, and William Kemeys, Jan., 1850 in Gerrit Smith, "Collected Political Papers by Gerrit Smith in the American Antiquarian Society."

⁵³ Indeed, Evans would become one of the agents who helped draw up names of potential grantees. There are a number of letters in the Gerrit Smith Papers at Syracuse University's Special Collections Research Center in which Evans is one of the signatories. See, for instance, John Cochrane, Isaac J. Hopper, Daniel C. Eaton, George H. Evans, List of Beneficiaries, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Box 145, Gifts of Land and Money to Negroes Folder; "Distribution of Lands to Colored Men; Begun in 1846."

⁵⁴ The sources are unclear on this point, but it seems, at least initially, that Smith was open to deeding black women land, as well. He later reconsidered, however, and instead gave eligible black women \$50. See John Cochrane, Daniel C. Eaton, George H. Evans. N.D. [ca. 1850] List of Beneficiaries. Box 145, Gifts of Land and Money to Negroes Folder. Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University; Asa B. Smith to Gerrit Smith. N.D. [ca. 1850]. Box 145, Gifts of Land and Money to Negroes Folder. Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University; John Cochrane, Isaac Hopper, D.C. Easton, William Kinney to Gerrit Smith. January 2, 1850. Box 145, Gifts of Land and Money to Negroes Folder. Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University.

⁵⁵ Henry Highland Garnet to Gerrit Smith, September 16, 1848, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 20, Garnet, Henry Highland 1845-73 folder.

⁵⁶ Henry Highland Garnet to Gerrit Smith, September 20, 1848, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 20, Garnet, Henry Highland 1845-73 folder.

⁵⁷ There's a sort of ranking going on here, though not along class lines: indeed, comparative wealth disqualified one from membership in Smith's plan. The ranking occurs against a different yardstick, one that emphasizes a Whiggish morality, restraint, and hard work. Henry Highland Garnet to Gerrit Smith, September 22, 1848, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 20, Garnet, Henry Highland 1845-73 Folder;

Charles B. Ray and James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, January 20, 1848, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 31, Ray, Charles Bennett Incoming Corres., 1847-1873.

⁵⁸ Wright, et. al., 3.

⁵⁹ For democratic and aristocratic agrarianism, see Smith, *African American Environmental Thought*, 43-51; and Stewart, "What Nature Suffers to Groe," 31-33. Though he doesn't necessarily define the two agrarianisms as such, Steven Stoll's entire *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002) is concerned with the changing intellectual conceptions of labor and their environmental impacts in a way that usefully adds a layer of subtlety to the simple division of aristocrats and democrats, partly by showing that even amongst the supposedly democratic agrarians there existed a dark streak of aristocracy.

⁶⁰ John C. Calhoun, *Speech on the Importance of Domestic Slavery*, in *American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology* Isaac Kramnick and Theodore J. Lowi, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009) 604-605.

⁶¹ George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South; or, the Failure of Free Society*, in *American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology* Isaac Kramnick and Theodore J. Lowi, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009) 629.

⁶² Wright, et. al., 3.

⁶³ "The Voice of the Slaveholder," Cassius M Clay, *The Liberty Tree* (Chicago) January 1, 1844.

⁶⁴ *The Tree of Liberty* (n.p.: 1846).

⁶⁵ Stewart argues convincingly that plantation agriculture was utterly dependent on a radical simplification and attempted total control of land and black bodies. Smith would agree, and add that African Americans knew this: she argues that a cornerstone of black environmentalism is the contention that "a denial of freedom to black Americans has distorted their relationship to the natural environment," and that the American landscape was "a corrupted land in need of redemption. Humans, in turn, are to be active, creative, co-equal partners in giving meaning to redeeming the natural world." Proctor takes the analysis one step further, when he extends the notion of mastery, prowess, and self-control to the hunting culture of the antebellum South: "Representing control over other people, animals, nature, and even death, this multifaceted concept [mastery] helped white southern men define themselves as patriarchs, and even, in some cases, as paternalists." He continues: "White southerners' preoccupation with violence sprang from their place at the pinnacle of a slave society. Maintaining the stability of their position required constant vigilance and decisive use of force in moments of crisis." Bookchin makes the same general point as Stewart, Smith, and Proctor, only more broadly, indicting *all* systems of hierarchy—not just slavery or racism. And this is why I think we need to pay more attention to the nineteenth-century utopians, who anticipated Bookchin in seeking to do away with slavery and racism, as well as all of the other forms of domination and hierarchy. Stewart, "What Nature Suffers to Groe," 88, 147-148, passim; Smith, *African American Environmental Thought*, 8, 18, 154, 157; Proctor, *Bathed in Blood*, 61, 72; Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*.

⁶⁶ As Stoll and Smith have shown, northern democratic agrarians, having astutely criticized southern aristocratic agrarians, tended to then elevate free labor and the free market as the apotheosis of democracy. Stoll adds a layer of complexity by showing that, for the northern improvers, at least, conservation, a tendency towards restraint, a "distaste for waste" also mixed with a faith in the free market, and so checked what we think of as an ethic of endless growth accompanying the free market. Smith, *African American Environmental Thought*, 43-51; Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, 71, 84, 94.

⁶⁷ Smith notes that even a Fire Eater and southern soil conservationist like Edmund Ruffin conceded that free laborers were the most careful, productive, and diligent kinds of laborers—as position which reinforced the need to brutalize recalcitrant black bodies. Smith, *African American Environmental Thought*, 50; For a detailed analysis of how slavery, soil conservation, and social stability were mutually exclusive (even though many nineteenth-century Southerners thought they were perfect bedfellows), see Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, especially chapter two, 69-169.

⁶⁸ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with Remarks on their Economy* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1859) 249, 522.

⁶⁹ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 270.

⁷⁰ The debate isn't dead yet, and the skulls, have more to say. A team of anthropologists at the University of Pennsylvania, after remeasuring some of Morton's skulls, finds Morton's method and results of an ascending hierarchy of skull volume culminating in large-brained white folks scientifically sound. "In fact, the Morton case provides an example of how the scientific method can shield results from cultural biases," conclude the authors of the study: "The data on cranial capacity gathered by Morton are generally reliable, and he reported them fully. Overall, we find that Morton's initial reputation as the objectivist of his era was well-deserved." See Nicholas Wade, "Scientists Measure the Accuracy of a Racism Claim," *New York Times*, online edition,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/14/science/14skull.html>, (accessed 1/19/2012); Jason E. Lewis, David DeGusta, Marc R. Meyer, Janet M. Monge, Alan E. Monn, Ralph L. Holloway, "The Mismeasure of Science: Stephen Jay Gould versus Samuel George Morton on Skulls and Bias," *PLoS Biology* 9, 6 (2011): e1001071. doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.1001071 (accessed 1/19/2012).

⁷¹ For Agassiz's views on natural history, race, and environment, see Louis Agassiz, "Geographical Distribution of Animals," *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany* 48, no. 2 (March, 1850), and Louis Agassiz, "The Diversity of Origin of the Human Races," *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany* 49, no. 1 (July, 1850). Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 102-112; Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos*, 186-193. Given these views, and Emerson's outspoken abolitionism, I have to wonder: how uncomfortable was their Adirondack trip? Though I'm inclined to read those lines from Emerson's poem, "But will we sacrifice our dear-bought lore/Of books and arts and trained experiment,/Or count the Sioux a match for Agassiz" as rhetorically begging the reader to answer "no," though I'm inclined to read them as just one more elevation of genteel civilization over rude savagery, a part of me wonders: was Emerson knowingly baiting the eminent scientist, aware that the mere suggestion, the physical proximity of the words, *Sioux, Agassiz*, was likely to cause Agassiz a bout of extreme physical revulsion? Emerson would have known that the Sioux never lived anywhere near the Adirondacks, never claimed the land for themselves: the poet imported them, turned them into metaphors for people who did not, natively, belong to the northern mountains. Is Emerson worrying around the fringes of Agassiz's environmental polygenism, pulling on a thread that will unravel the whole?

I'm not sure, I'm pretty sure not, but that passage, especially, leaves me unsettled.

⁷² The final chapter of Valenčius's *The Health of the Country* is devoted to exploring the simultaneous confidence in and anxiety about environmentally determined racism among white Americans in the antebellum Southeast.

"Change of place," she writes, "created change of person in the inchoate borderlands. In health, in skin, color, in countenance, in modes of life and habits of being, even in political allegiance, the process of acclimating to a place was irrevocably and unstoppably transformative." Though she's almost exclusively concerned with how place could make a white person non-white, there's no reason that the process couldn't work in reverse. See Valenčius, *The Health of the Country*, especially chapter 8, "Racial Anxiety," 229-258, 230.

⁷³ This is Harlow's take, but he gives it a derisive spin, as if Smith were a Boss Tweed figure. See Harlow, *Gerrit Smith*, 245-246. For a much more sympathetic, balanced view, see Godine, "Forty Acres and a Vote," 50; and Jones, "They Called it Timbuctoo," 29.

⁷⁴ This is a more common interpretation, and can be found in both Donaldson, *A History of the Adirondacks*, 2:3 and Reynolds, *John Brown*, 125. For a good discussion of the Underground Railroad in the Adirondacks, see Tom Calarco, *The Underground Railroad in the Adirondack Region* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004).

⁷⁵ Conevery Bolton Valenčius argues that in the nineteenth-century, the human body and landscape were understood to be directly, intimately linked. Valenčius shows that "the geography of health" points to a "surprising holism in the worldview of the bustling, rapidly industrializing nineteenth century," that nineteenth century Americans were much more environmentally conscious (and conscious in a way that we, in the U.S. may no longer be capable of) than many current scholars give them credit for. Bolton tends to focus on material health, but I think her work can be extended to see how healthy landscape could help engender a sort of ethical and social health. Additionally, her final chapter is devoted to exploring the simultaneous confidence in and anxiety about environmentally determined racism among white Americans in the antebellum Southeast. "Change of place," she writes, "created change of person in the inchoate borderlands. In health, in skin, color, in countenance, in modes of life and habits of being, even in political allegiance, the process of acclimating to a place was irrevocably and unstoppably transformative." Though she's almost exclusively concerned with how place could make a white person non-white, there's no reason that the process couldn't work in reverse. Valenčius, *The Health of the Country*, 3, 229-258, 230. and chapter 8, "Racial Anxiety."

⁷⁶ Though the radical Democrats were quite influential in coming decades, in the 1840s they couldn't compete with the political power of either the moderate Democrats or the Whigs, and in the 1830s and 40s were in a similar position to Smith and his Adirondack agents, struggling to articulate an intellectual foundation for their movement. It's also important to note that there were a number of European intellectuals—including the work of Alexander von Humboldt, Denis Diderot, Immanuel Kant, and Johann Herder, among others—whose work was making their impact felt on American reformers and radicals (perhaps most clearly on the Transcendentalists), at precisely this time. See Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos*; Sachs, *The Humboldt Current*; Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire*; Gura, *American Transcendentalism*.

⁷⁷ “The philosophy of permanence,” Stoll writes of something he never defines as democratic agrarianism, but which closely conforms to Smith’s definition, “created a countryside of exclusion.” In short, the northern agrarians extolling the virtues of soil conservation, scientific farming, and a rooted population, had little but disdain for the scruffy Jacksonian Democrat looking to better himself. Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, 91.

⁷⁸ Christopher Clark notes that between 1800 and 1914 at least 260 communes were formed in the U.S., and a great majority of these began in the 1840s because “the early 1840s was the moment when there was room for them to make a difference.” Christopher Clark, *The Communitarian Moment: The Radical Challenge of the Northampton Association* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995) 10.

⁷⁹ Donald E. Pitzer, “The New Moral World Order of Robert Owen and New Harmony,” in *America’s Communal Utopias*, Donald E. Pitzer, ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 89-100, 106.

⁸⁰ Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 427-429; Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 2-4; Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement*, 130-161; Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative*, 44-59; Gura, *American Transcendentalism*, 150-168. For the most comprehensive recent treatment of Brook Farm, one that is more concerned with the internal contradictions which finally proved too much for the communards to overcome, see Sterling F. Delano, *Brook Farm: The Dark Side of Utopia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: European Publishing Company, 1898) 449; for MacDaniel’s Louisiana experiment, which, I should add, was predicated on gradual, compensated emancipation and eventual colonization outside the United States, see Carl Guarneri’s characteristically excellent, nuanced, and sympathetic article, “Two Utopian Socialist Plans for Gradual Emancipation in Antebellum Louisiana,” *Louisiana History* 24, 1 (Winter, 1983): 5-24. MacDaniel would later try to set up a *different* commune in the Adirondacks.

⁸¹ Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement*, 117-130; Richard Francis, *Fruitlands: The Alcott Family and Their Search for Utopia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) 1, 281.

⁸² “Northampton would change Sojourner’s life,” writes Margaret Washington, in her recent biography of Sojourner Truth. For Truth’s tenure at Northampton, see Washington’s *Sojourner Truth’s America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009) especially chapter 10, “A Holy City: Sojourner Truth and the Northampton Community,” 156-174; Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, 12-14, 31, 56-57, 71, 73-74, 99.

⁸³ John Humphrey Noyes, *History of American Socialisms* (New York: Hilary House Publishers, Ltd., 1961) 154.

⁸⁴ Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 123-124.

⁸⁵ Adin Ballou, *History of the Hopedale Community: From its Inception to its Virtual Submergence in the Hopedale Parish* (Lowell: Thompson & Hill.—The Vox Populi Press, 1897) 10-11.

⁸⁶ Ballou, *History of the Hopedale Community*, 77, 143.

⁸⁷ Perry, *Radical Abolitionism*, 144.

⁸⁸ Thomas, “Antislavery and Utopia,” 258, 254-259.

⁸⁹ In fact, it was Noyes who initially turned Garrison down the path to anarchism, partially by means of a long letter in which he compared the U.S. government to “a fat libertine flogging Negroes and torturing Indians.” Perry, *Radical Abolitionism*, 63-69; Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 131-133.

⁹⁰ Ballou, *History of the Hopedale Community*, 47.

⁹¹ Besides the rural, agricultural community in the Adirondacks, Smith also tried to set up a more urban black commune on part of his inheritance. The Florence community was apparently part of a larger scheme, not just open to black New Yorkers, but to African Americans throughout the Northeast, and active recruitment for suitable settlers occurred in Boston and Philadelphia, as well as New York City and Albany. Florence was intended as a sort of suburb, a village that had its own field just outside of town, an experiment to combine the benefits of agriculture with the consocial attributes of the city. Again, there’s an explicit celebration of the political possibilities of mutual aid: “That when considered in a political point of view,” wrote the members of the Florence Settlement Company of Berkshire county, Massachusetts to *The North Star* in February, 1849, “it is the imperative duty of every colored man of Massachusetts, who is a lover of political equality, of civil and religious freedom, and of free institutions in general to emigrate to that settlement, and the other lands to be obtained, and join hands with their colored brethren of that State to break down the prejudices and political inequalities which now hang like a pall around them.” “Settlements for Colored Men,” *The North Star*, December 8, 1848; “Florence Settlement,” *The North Star*, February 23, 1849; “New Bedford, March 22, 1848,” *The North Star*, March 30, 1849; see also Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 98, index to ledger A, Florence lands undated Folder, and Box 106, Lands in the town of Florence, Oneida County Folder.

⁹² The great exception is John L. Thomas, whose characteristically incisive, well-written, critical article, “Antislavery and Utopia,” is just about the only secondary source that I have found linking abolition to utopian socialism. “The century since the Civil War,” Thomas begins, “has slowly altered the portrait of the anti-slavery agitator until the utopian demeanor and perfectionist pose, softened by periodic restorations, has nearly been lost.” History, he alleges, and historians have done their job of blunting, softening the past, making it palatable, safely tucking it into an invalid’s bed where it can do no harm, and offer no challenge to us today. It’s just such a focus on radical and alternative political, social, and economic systems that can complement Kimberly Smith’s truly foundational *African American Environmental Thought*, on the (mainstream) roots of black environmental activism Smith. See John L. Thomas, “Antislavery and Utopia,” in *The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists*, Martin Duberman, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965) 240.

⁹³ Oelschlager, *The Idea of Wilderness*, 48-53.

⁹⁴ I think that the utopian socialists understood their experiments as a moment of great transition in western history, a moment where true progress—economic and technological as well as political, social, environmental, and individual—was in the offing, a moment where the old hierarchies were finally being buried and a new day of equality, justice, beauty, and personal fulfillment was dawning. The very spaces that they set up fostered this coming day. It’s a day that hasn’t dawned yet, a day that Henri Lefebvre longed for, a day that would bring with it a new kind of social space, adding a new page to the history of unequal social relations written in the landscape, a day marked by a certain sort of transition: “We may therefore justifiably speak of a transitional period between the mode of productions of things in space and the mode of production of space. The production of things was fostered by capitalism and controlled by the bourgeoisie and its political creation, the state. The production of space brings other things in its train, among them the withering-away of the private ownership of space, and, simultaneously, of the political state that dominates space. This implies a shift from domination to appropriation, and the primacy of use over exchange.” The withering away of competitive capitalism—that’s a pretty good way to describe many of the utopian communes. I also think that it’s here that Murray Bookchin’s social analysis can help us see what the utopian socialists were up to. The utopian socialists articulated it differently, but had Alcott and Ripley and Ballou been able to meet Lefebvre and Bookchin, they would have found comrades in each other. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 408-410.

⁹⁵ There were also a number of highly visible black utopias—like Nashoba, in Tennessee during the 1820s and 30s—though their biographers, William and Jane Pease, take great pains to assure their readers that these were in no way radical, but eminently moderate, and explicitly seek to distance the communities from utopian socialism: “Insofar as the Negro communities were planned and internally highly organized and regulated, they resembled the many Utopian communities which were their contemporaries. But in one vital respect they differed widely, and this prime difference destroyed any fundamental similarity between them. The Utopian communities were, by definition, communal in structure and communal in their outlook. They were in the European tradition of socialism and communism. Not so the organized Negro communities. If they partook of an specific social, economic, and political philosophy, it was the philosophy of the American Middle Class.” I think the Peases unnecessarily drove stark lines, and over-simplified both the extent to which American utopian socialism was a European offshoot (the anarchist communes certainly weren’t, and even the Fourierist communes tended to be run along the lines of Associationism, an American take on Fourierism) and the extent to which an “American Middle Class” social, economic, and political philosophy existed. Almost all of these black communities—Wilberforce, Dawn, Elgin, and the Refugee Home Society—were located just north of the Canadian border. Henry Bibb, who was one of those receiving land from Smith, was one of the leaders of the Refugee Home Society in the 1850s. William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, *Black Utopia: Negro Communal Experiments in America* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963) 18-19.

⁹⁶ “Extract,” *The North Star*, April 21, 1848.

⁹⁷ Sernett argues that though “movement abolitionism,” those attuned to Garrisonian critiques, has traditionally been told as a tale of white activism, African Americans played a large role, and that, especially in upstate New York, their voices contributed to a richly potent brand of antislavery resistance. Kimberly K. Smith has argued that there’s such a thing as “the black concept,” an understanding of wilderness that is rooted in the essential affinity between landscape and identity, and that this black concept is an entirely different way of looking at wilderness than what is considered to be the standard wilderness idea (as I’ll argue later, though Smith is certainly on to something, she very much overplays the exclusivity of landscape and identity to black thought). She furthermore argues that the black concept is in many ways at the root of black activism. No one has yet sought to combine the history of utopianism, African American history, and environmental history, but in Sernett and Smith, we can see two historiographical

shores that might be bridged. Sernett, *North Star Country*, xix-xx; Kimberly K. Smith, "What Is Africa to Me?: Wilderness in Black Thought, 1860-1930," in *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate*, J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds., (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008) 301-304.

301-304; Wright, et. al., *An Address to the Three Thousand Colored Citizens*, 9.

⁹⁸ Indeed, one of the striking features of America's communal utopias is how thoroughly they graft their rhetoric to the diseased rootstock of Manifest Destiny, and repurpose it into a philosophy not of individualism and easy financial wealth, but of social fulfillment. Fourier is one of the clearest examples of this, for part of his plan was to cover the landscape in phalanxes—small, self-sufficient communities of 1620 people, self-reproducing, infinitely extendable, a spatial, communal reconfiguration of the grid. In a similar vein, LeMenager notes that deserts terrified white Americans because they could be racially destabilizing. Deserts and wilderness have a long association with each other in the western, Judeo-Christian tradition, and so it's not hard to see the fear of the desert bleeding into the fear of forested wilderness—that place of shades—more generally. But this fear could be, *was* reappropriated, turned into possibility, and as many historians have pointed out, the woods were seen by many slaves as a place of relative safety, hidden from the probing eyes of the overseer, a place for secret meetings, celebrations, religious gatherings, or a place of (often brief) refuge—a place to run away to. Craig Steven Wilder has argued that many African Americans retained a great deal of African culture, that the master may have dominated black bodies, but could never achieve complete hegemony. He points especially to widespread secret societies and public associations: "Through secret societies, African Americans re-created African social relationships in the United States and achieved power in the face of bondage." For instance, in 1849, there were over 100 African American benevolent societies in Philadelphia alone. Finally, Wilder takes a fluid, dialectical approach to culture, arguing that white and black cultures in the U.S. were mutually constitutive. And so, while I've emphasized the intellectual and cultural roots of utopian socialism, Wilder shows us that there's still much work to be done exploring socialism—or at least nominally socialistic mutual aid societies—in the black community. See LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies*, 46; Baker, *Heartless Immensity*, 3; "Gerrit Smith's Land," *The North Star*, February 25, 1848; Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2001) 11, 13, 53, 55, 58, 62.

⁹⁹ Wright, et. al., *An Address to the Three Thousand Colored Citizens*, 10.

¹⁰⁰ The rhetoric can also be read as falling within a prevailing notion of republican citizenship. The slave, as Leslie Harris points out, was the antithesis of the independent individual citizen who was under no obligation to anyone and whose vote, therefore, could not be coerced. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 49; James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, December 17, 1846. Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 34, Smith, James McCune Incoming Corres. Folder.

¹⁰¹ Stephanie LeMenager has argued that it is important to "consider radical abolitionism...as a mode of political thought that generated landscapes distinct from the territorial state imagined by the U.S. ideology of Manifest Destiny." I'd agree, though I'd be careful not to over-romanticize how completely removed the radical abolitionists were from Manifest Destiny. Of course some of the ideology of imperialism and territorial expansion slopped into the abolitionists' thinking—and yet the abolitionists, were nevertheless able to imagine an alternate landscape of freedom. See LeMenager, "Marginal Landscapes," 55.

¹⁰² Indeed, Kimberly Smith argues that the plantation was often reimagined by African Americans as a desolate wilderness. Smith, "What Is Africa to Me?," 305.

¹⁰³ Wright, et. al., *An Address to the Three Thousand Colored Citizens*, 10, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Stauffer argues that Gerrit Smith and James McCune Smith—as well as John Brown and Frederick Douglass—were remarkable in their time for being among the very few Americans who could blur the color line; in fact, they could blur most social distinctions in a way that is now *de rigueur* in the academy, but was radically new in the antebellum U.S. I think that one of the ways they do so is to emphasize something common to all humans: labor, and in this case, the most idealized form of labor, husbandry. Valenčius points out that to cultivate, the act of the husbandman, was often explicitly an activity of healing, of bringing something to its fullest potential. And so there's a clear link between the work of cultivating and the work of healing a nation eroded by racial discord. Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 2, 14, 19, 38, passim; Valenčius, *The Health of the Country*, 192.

¹⁰⁵ In 1859, Robert M. De Witt wrote of North Elba, "scarcely a vestige now remains of this colony, although at one time so numerous that it seemed probably the anomalous political aspect would be exhibited of a town in New York controlled by negro suffrages, and represented in the county board by Colored Supervisors." Robert M. De Witt, *The Life, Trial and Execution of Captain John Brown* (New York: Robert M. De Witt, 1859) 9.

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- ¹⁰⁶ Godine, "Forty Acres and a Vote," 52; "Convention of Gerrit Smith's Grantees," *National Era* February 11, 1847; "To Hon. Gerrit Smith," *National Era* April 15, 1847.
- ¹⁰⁷ "Movements of the Grantees of the City of Troy," *The North Star*, November 10, 1848.
- ¹⁰⁸ Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, 58; "Correspondence," *The North Star* January 7, 1848; "The Smith Lands," *The North Star* February 18, 1848.
- ¹⁰⁹ Gerrit Smith, "From the *Model Worker*," 1848 in "Collected Printed Papers by Gerrit Smith in the American Antiquarian Society," 1835-1874. Volume 1.
- ¹¹⁰ *The North Star* reported that Samuel, Lewis, and Harriet Johnson; Thomas, Moses, Susan, Sarah, Robert, and another Sarah Wilson; George W.B. Wilson; William Bunday; David Thorrington; Samuel, Sammuel B., Rhoda, and Mary Drummonds; James and Catharine Runalds; Alexander and Matilda Gordon; W.A., Isaac, Sarah, Julia, and Mary Smith; Richard and Enos Nelson; Thomas Washington; Abnder and Rebecca Nelson; Ezekial II., John C., Mary, Sarah E., and Maria M. Smith; Benjamin and Mrs. Degruder; Charles Thompson; and Alexander Roach all intended to head to Franklin County in 1848. Accompanying Hodges initially were Thomas Wilson, Samuel Drummonds, E.H. Smith, George B. Wilosn, W.B. Smith and family, G.W. Lott and family, Charles C.W. Brown and family, and Perry William and family. "Gerrit Smith's Lands," *The North Star*, March 24, 1848; Willis Hodges, *Free Man of Color: The Autobiography of Willis Augustus Hodges*, William B. Gatewood, ed., (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982) xlv, 77-80;
- ¹¹¹ Charles B. Ray and James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, July 27, 1847. Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 31, Ray, Cahrles Bennett Incoming Corres 1847-1873 Folder.
- ¹¹² "Movements of the Grantees of the City of Troy," *The North Star*, November 10, 1848.
- ¹¹³ "Gerrit Smith's Lands," *The North Star*, March 24, 1848.
- ¹¹⁴ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, February 6, 1850, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 34, Smith, James McCune Incoming Corres. Folder.
- ¹¹⁵ "Mr. Waite J. Lewis and the Smith's Lands," *The North Star*, February 16, 1849.
- ¹¹⁶ Jones writes that, "for a people who have known the agony of a system in which family members could be routinely sold away from one another—wives from husbands, children from mothers—land stood as one of the only tangible possessions that could not be easily confiscated. For African Americans, the attainment of land was a priceless step toward self-sufficiency and security." Jones, "They Called it Timbuctoo," 32.
- ¹¹⁷ "New Bedford, March 22, 1848," *The North Star*, March 30, 1849.
- ¹¹⁸ "Meeting of the Rochester Grantees," *The North Star*, December 15, 1848.
- ¹¹⁹ "New York, May 18, 1848," *The North Star*, January 12, 1849.
- ¹²⁰ Quoted in Don Papson, "The John Thomas Story: From Slavery in Maryland to American Citizenship in the Adirondacks" in the *Lake Champlain Weekly*, October 18, 2006. I owe a debt of thanks to Don Papson for sending me his articles.
- ¹²¹ Kimberly N. Ruffin has recently argued that, historically, African Americans "forged identities as ecological participants based on their work rather than a privileged position in the social fabric." That is to say, African Americans have historically used work, rather than leisure, to signify their membership as ecological citizens. Looking at black environmental thought, then, is a one way to answer Richard White's persuasive challenge to environmental historians—and environmentalists more generally—to start recognizing work as one of our most important daily interactions with the natural world. Ruffin has begun to show us how black notions of nature add a welcomed layer of complexity to the historiography of nature and wilderness. Smith's identification of a tradition that she calls black agrarianism is particularly useful here, especially her argument that black agrarians "fused the abolitionists' north-south moral geography with the sacred landscape of the slave spirituals...[creating] a moral landscape with both political and spiritual meaning," as well as the emphasis Smith finds among black agrarians on landownership as well as free labor. See Ruffin, *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions*, 28, 29, 40, 42, 54; Richard White, "Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?: Work and Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, William Cronon, ed., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996) 171-172, 173; Smith, *African American Environmental Thought*, 56, 58.
- ¹²² Smith, "What is Africa to Me?" 301.
- ¹²³ McMartin, *The Great Forests of the Adirondacks*, especially chapter 5, "The Adirondacks from 1850-1890: Forests as Industry," 29-74;

¹²⁴ As Barbara McMartin points out, this was often because the clearing was tightly centered on a few main nodes, which tended to be on the fringes of what we now consider to be the Adirondack Park. By 1855, somewhere around 9 percent of the future Park had been cleared for farming. McMartin, *The Great Forest of the Adirondacks*, 22.

¹²⁵ Schneider, *The Adirondacks*, 204.

¹²⁶ “Convention of Colored People,” *The North Star*, October 20, 1848. As Kimberly K. Smith has argued, wilderness and settled areas have a complicated, paradoxical relationship in African American intellectual history. Plantations were often seen as the desolate, empty, howling voids, while the woods were “the origin and foundation of culture, and intimately connected to one’s cultural (and particularly racial) identity.” The wilderness was a place of escape, refuge, and resistance—as in the Maroon colonies. They were spaces where slaves could meet for illicit religious worship, the liminal spaces where separated wives and husbands and friends and children and parents might still be able to meet, spaces that allowed for hunting or fishing or foraging. And so, for many antebellum blacks in the South, the wilderness was “a place not to escape from but to confront one’s history, community, and identity.” Smith, “What Is Africa to Me?,” 302, 304, 320.

¹²⁷ Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 5-6, 15, 66.

¹²⁸ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, December 28, 1846, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 34, Smith, James McCune Incoming Corres. Folder.

¹²⁹ Names Illegible [C.S. Morton, Benjamin Latimore, P.W. Grommell, J.P. Anthony, Richard Thompson] to Gerrit Smith, November 4, 1846, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 145, Gifts of Land and Money to Negroes Folder.

¹³⁰ Charles B. Ray to Gerrit Smith, May 24 1847. Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 31, Ray, Charles Bennett Incoming Corres 1847-1873 Folder.

¹³¹ Mr. Osgood is deacon, a man of some property, about \$8000, has a good farm, with large barns & outbuildings, & keeps tavern.” Richard Henry Dana, *The Journal of Richard Henry Dana, Jr.*, Robert F. Lucid, ed. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968) 1:373; Charles B. Ray and James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, July 27, 1847.

¹³² James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, March 27, 1848. Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 34, Smith, James McCune Incoming Corres. Folder; James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, May 12, 1848. Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 34, Smith, James McCune Incoming Corres. Folder.

¹³³ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, July 7, 1848. Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 34, Smith, James McCune Incoming Corres. Folder.

¹³⁴ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, February 6, 1850, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Box 34, Smith, James McCune Incoming Corres. Folder.

¹³⁵ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, February 6, 1850.

¹³⁶ John Thomas to Gerrit Smith, Bloomingdale, Essex County, NY, Aug. 26th, 1872. Gerrit Smith Papers, Cornell University Library (Glen Rock, NJ: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1975) microfilm, reel 18.

¹³⁷ McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, February 6, 1850.

¹³⁸ Franklin Sanborn’s conclusion—that “there was no opening in the woods of Essex for waiters, barbers, coachmen, washer-women, or the other occupations for which negroes had been trained”—a conclusion that was advanced in order to bolster Sanborn’s hagiographic take on Brown, has become the dominant one. See F.B. Sanborn, ed., *The Life and Letters of John Brown, Liberator of Kansas, and Martyr of Virginia* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969) 97.

¹³⁹ McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, February 6, 1850.

¹⁴⁰ Franklin Sanborn recounts a story told by Brown’s oldest son, also named Brown: “He finally grew tired of these frequent slight admonitions for my laziness and other short-comings, and concluded to adopt with me a sort of book-account, something like this:—

John, Jr.,

For disobeying mother.....8 lashes

“ unfaithfulness at work.....3 “

“ telling a lie.....8 “

This account he showed me from time to time. On a certain Sunday morning he invited me to accompany him from the house to the tannery, saying that he had concluded it was time for a settlement. We went into the upper or finishing room, and after a long and tearful talk over my faults, he again showed me my account, which exhibited a fearful footing up of *debts*. I had no credits or off-sets, and was of course bankrupt. I then paid about *one-third* of

the debt, reckoned in strokes from a nicely-prepared blue-beech switch, laid on ‘masterly.’ Then, to my utter astonishment, father stripped off his shirt, and, seating himself on a block, gave me the whip and bade me ‘lay it on’ to his bare back.” The sterile language of capitalism—the account books, the ever-present debits and impossible-to-earn credits—can’t obscure the horror of a child whose every infraction is measured in lashes and who is then made to whip his own father. There’s an almost sadomasochistic eroticism in this recollection and the many others like it that shows Brown’s fascination with violence. See Sanborn, *The Life and Letters of John Brown*, 91-93; Reynolds, *John Brown*, 41.

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Sanborn, *The Life and Letters of John Brown*, 97.

¹⁴² I’m relying heavily on David S. Reynolds’s *John Brown, Abolitionist*, for Brown’s character. I can’t say that I agree with everything Reynolds writes about Brown: I find myself too sympathetic with a radical nonresistance to find Brown’s terrorism (to use Reynolds’s conclusion) as anything but deeply wrongheaded. I guess now is probably as good a time as any to say that I’m not interested in a counterfactual debate about what would have happened had Brown not raided Harper’s Ferry, had the nation not tipped toward war, had abolitionism followed strictly nonresistant lines. Lewis Perry has pointed out that nonresistance was much more effective as a critique, but was confounded when it came to action. I think Perry is on to something, though I also think that nonresistance had the potential—and did indeed, accomplish—much more than point out America’s dirty underbelly. I think we can agree, dear reader, that destroying slavery was a good thing, and I hope we can also agree that destroying so many soldiers’ and civilians’ lives was a bad one—but for now I’ll excuse myself from the calculus of whether or not the brutality of the Civil War was “worth it.” To be totally frank, I’m not even sure how to have that conversation, and I find something callous about the abstract way that nearly one million American casualties and millions of enslaved bodies tend to be cavalierly chalked up in an attempt to weigh cost and benefit. One of the things that I greatly admire about Reynolds’s *John Brown* is that, though Reynolds is very clearly in the pro-Brown camp, he gives us a subtle and nuanced enough picture of the man—it’s awfully gutsy to praise terrorism in the post 9/11 U.S.—that we can come to our own conclusions.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Harlow, *Gerrit Smith*, 246.

¹⁴⁴ It’s an old tale of locals swindling a newcomer, and when Jermain Wesley Loguen published the report of his tour of the Adirondacks, he warned, “I found that a high-handed game had been played upon many of our coloured brethren, who had gone there, to visit the lands of which they had received deeds.... Of course it is necessary for one unacquainted with the country, to procure a guide or pilot, to enable him to find the object of his pursuit; and he will not fail to meet those who are very ready to afford—nay, who eagerly proffer him their services. But there is need that he should be very careful to whom he entrusts himself, else he may be kept several days and nights travelling in the woods, and at length be shown a very desirable lot, and be charged twelve shillings or two dollars a-day for the service of the pilot, and after all, may never have been near the lot that is really his; or he may be taken to a very undesirable spot—perhaps a mountain peak or an irrecoverable swamp, and when he has paid well for the toil of his pilot, that has ended in blank disappointment, he will kindly be offered four or five dollars for his estate, and be made to think himself happy to get rid of it so well.... I gathered the facts, on which I rest these intimations of danger, from the jokes I heard passing around the men who had perpetrated these villanies, and from respectable persons in the neighborhood, who had heard of them, and from the clerks of the counties in whose offices the transfers of the properties were recorded.” *The North Star* then ran ads, and endorsed a surveyor, Justice of the Peace, and Post Master from Keene, named Wait J. Lewis, as a person who could be trusted. But here, too, controversy arose, with some “calling into question not only the ability, but the integrity of this gentleman, bidding the grantees of the Smith lands to beware of placing money in his hands.” The plot, however, thickens, and it seems as though Lewis may have been attempting to form his own African American village on lot 12 of township 12, a bit of land that he had purchased and called Freeman’s Home; at the same time, he was the surveyor for an association called the “Gerrit Smith Farmer’s Association,” which was promoting settlement in Freeman’s Home. It’s unclear, to me at least, whether Lewis was endorsed by Smith and was promoting his own project on the side, or even in tandem with Smith, or if he was a huckster, and was deliberately conflating Smith’s grant with his own Freeman’s Home—a settlement which, it should be said, offered 40 square rods instead of 40 square acres of land (40 square rods is a quarter of an acre)—and somehow getting grantees to exchange their larger lots for his smaller ones. Whatever the case may be, grantees were angry, Lewis was in a hurry to exonerate himself, and *The North Star* continued to run his ads. See “Gerrit Smith’s Lands,” *The North Star*, March 24, 1848; “Gerrit Smith’s Lands,” *The North Star*, December 8, 1848; “Meeting of the Rochester Grantees,” *The North Star*, December 15, 1848; “Wait J. Lewis,” *The North Star*, January 12, 1849; “From the Northern Star and Colored Farmer,” *The North Star*, February 2, 1849; “Mr. Waite J. Lewis and the Smith’s Lands,” *The North Star*, February 16, 1849.

¹⁴⁵ In November of 1848, *The North Star* reprinted a letter from Brown, who was telling of his trip to the Adirondacks which seems like it occurred in the fall of 1848: "I take this opportunity of saying to all of my colored friends in a few words, that I am an experienced Surveyor, and that I have followed that business both in the Northern, Western and Southern States, and that I have lately explored to some extent, those parts of the country in which are located the lands donated by Gerrit Smith Esq., and that they possess many very superior natural advantages." "Movements of the Grantees of the City of Troy," *The North Star*, November 10, 1848.

¹⁴⁶ Ruth Thompson, quoted in Sanborn, *The Life and Letters of John Brown*, 99.

¹⁴⁷ In January of 1849, Brown wrote to Hodges that "Mr. Pennington is about to start for the West Indies and for England, to collect means to aid in building up the infant colony on the Smith lands." "John Brown in Essex County," *Evening Post*, December 20, 1859.

¹⁴⁸ In an oft-cited recollection, Richard Henry Dana, Jr., wrote that when he visited Brown in the Adirondacks, he encountered "a tall, gaunt, dark-complexioned man, walking before his wagon, having his theodolite and other surveyor's instruments with him." See Sanborn, *The Life and Letters of John Brown*, 103.

¹⁴⁹ It's devilishly hard to exactly pinpoint when Brown was in the Adirondacks, and I'm sure that many refinements could be made to my chronology, which I've cobbled together from sources (themselves none-too-clear) including Sanborn, *The Life and Letters of John Brown*, 97-115; Donaldson, *A History of the Adirondacks*, 2: 3-12; Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 168-174; and Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist*, 89, 94, 125-137, 233.

¹⁵⁰ John Brown to John Brown, Jr., June, 1854. Quoted in Sanborn, *The Life and Letters of John Brown*, 105.

¹⁵¹ The literature on Brown is immense, and takes up several shelves in the Cornell University Library, so I've tried to choose the most influential examples of how Brown scholars have written about the Adirondacks. Reynolds writes, "his [Brown's] community, like his other projects, was destined to fail economically," but the settlements were never his idea in the first place, and I find no reason whatsoever to make Brown the major protagonist in this history. One of Brown's earliest biographers, Oswald Garrison Villard, constructs his narrative to reflect Brown's selflessness in moving to the Adirondacks: despite Brown's heroic efforts, the colony failed. There's really no sense in Villard that the pioneers had any agency themselves, and are instead mostly just set pieces who align themselves in order to show Brown in the most flattering light. And Stephen B. Oates, though he does a remarkable job in capturing Brown's desperation in the late 1840s, also chalks the entire Adirondack experiment up to Brown: "As their new leader he hoped to teach these 'poor despised Africans' how to farm and better themselves, and he would also teach them to fear God. If it were the will of Providence, he would develop North Elba from the disorganized place it was now into a model Negro community that would stand as an example to the world." See Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist*, 126; Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown: A Biography Fifty Years After* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1965) 71-76; Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land With Blood: A Biography of John Brown*, 2nd ed. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984) 66.

¹⁵² James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, February 6, 1850.

¹⁵³ Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 172, 184.

¹⁵⁴ Lewis Perry notes that nonresistance was one of the casualties of Harper's Ferry, and that after 1859 "almost no nonresistant voice remained to be raised against force and violence.... Once [radical abolitionists] had criticized men and institutions for relying on the implicit threat of violence; now their criticism was directed against those who did not live up to their standards of violence that nonresistants imputed to them." And John L. Thomas notes that, "What the North needed in 1861 was the continuing ideal of the good society—both the dream, and the kind of thinking and planning which the dream engendered. In order to abolish slavery, to raise the Negro to citizenship, and to build a racial democracy, the self-styled realism of the politicians was not enough.... The result was uncompleted social-revolution." Part of the problem was that radical abolitionists, like the Transcendentalists, like the Fourierists, increasingly turned from a social vision to a militantly individual one focused only on the self. Anne C. Rose, writes "Capitalism came of age in American when it became clear that the Transcendentalists, and other radical reformers, had not been able to communicate to their contemporaries the belief in a social alternative, and had lost faith in themselves." And Guarneri argues that abolitionism and an almost mystical faith in free-market capitalism went hand in hand (though, I would argue that he doesn't give quite enough agency to the nonresistants, and I also think his assumption that slavery was a non-capitalist enterprise, though it was often rhetorically pictured that way by its supporters as a sort of humane alternative to northern wage slavery, is misleading), and that, as the nation neared war, to be an abolitionist increasingly meant to be a free-market capitalist. It's a vision that a modern-day thinker like Murray Bookchin derides as "lifestyle anarchism," as a sort of easy facade that seeks shelter in therapeutic positioning, and indeed paves the way for the splintering of potentially radical constituencies into extremely regressive, conservative ideologies (this has not been an unopposed concept in recent anarchist thought). See Perry,

Radical Abolitionism, 259, 260-261, 268, 270; Thomas, "Antislavery and Utopia," 265, 268; Gura, *American Transcendentalism*, 304-306; Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement*, 207-208, 218-225; Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative*, especially chapter 15, "Fourierism and the Coming of the Civil War," 368-383; Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1995).

¹⁵⁵ The longest lived was Lyman Epps, Jr., who was born in the Adirondacks and whose father Lyman Epps was one of the original grantees and who helped build the Brown house (he wrote his name on a board that can still be seen in the attic of the Brown farm). Epps, Jr., died in 1942. And there are still descendants of the pioneers who live in the Adirondack region. See Don Papson's series of articles, "The John Thomas Story: From Slavery in Maryland to American Citizenship in the Adirondacks," *Lake Champlain Weekly*, October 18, 2006; October 25, 2006; November 1, 2006; and especially November 8, 2006.

¹⁵⁶ Writing about the shibboleth of critical distance, that phrase so unexaminedly beloved of academic historians, Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes that many professional historians effectively neuter themselves: "By virtue of its professional claims, the guild cannot express political opinions as such—quite contrary, of course, to activists and lobbyists. Thus, ironically, the more important an issue for specific segments of civil society, the more subdued the interpretations of the facts offered by most professional historians." Too infrequently have historians recognized the great costs of Brown's ideological victory; and too frequently have historians held Brown up as a shining example of revolutionary commitment, too often does Brown become the symbol of someone willing to live by his convictions—as if violence is the only way to prove that one is serious. "Power is constitutive of the story" that all historians try to tell, Trouillot writes, power enters the scene at the very moment the historian consults her source, and in canonizing Brown, in the vicarious identification with him (the subtitle of Reynolds's book is *The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights*: who doesn't want to stand in that tradition?) many historians try to position themselves as Brown's descendants. Yet, I've never met an historian who is willing to follow Brown's lead, to take up arms and take down lives in defense of The Cause. I often think that the point of deifying Brown is to let ourselves off the hook: he died for our sins and absolves us with his blood. He acted so we don't have to. As long as we stand in the shadow of his revolutionary banner, we, too, can be "serious." But I'm just not sure there's anything serious or even particularly worthwhile in Brown's example: certainly, great tragedy has been brought upon the world by those who are willing to enforce God's law as revealed to them only, by any means necessary. While Brown's end—destroying slavery—was a social good, I can't find a way to accept his method, and I am one of those who does not think that the ends justify the means. This is why I think that it is a double tragedy that the Adirondack experiment has been forgotten, for its simplicity is the root of its radical proposition: as an historical example and challenge, it demands our best action, rather than lazily relying on bludgeoning our opponents into acquiescence with military might. It's powerful, in the way that all truly radical movements are, *because* it asks so little, only that we work together towards a society free of violence. It was a demand that asked too much of Brown, and he buried it, too. One of the best musings on landscape, power, history, activism, and the way that academic historians have silenced the past is Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). For specific quotations see pages 21, 28, 29.

¹⁵⁷ William H.H. Murray, *Adventures in the Wilderness; or, Camp-Life in the Adirondacks* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1869) 43.

¹⁵⁸ Seneca Ray Stoddard, *John Brown's Grave and the "Big Rock," North Elba*, Library of Congress, BIOG File—Brown, John, 1800-1859.

¹⁵⁹ Stillman, *The Autobiography of a Journalist*, 1:209.

¹⁶⁰ Stillman, *The Autobiography of a Journalist*, 1:167.

¹⁶¹ Stillman, *The Autobiography of a Journalist*, 1: 179-180.

¹⁶² Stillman, *The Autobiography of a Journalist*, 2: 211.

¹⁶³ J.T. Headley, *The Adirondack; Or Life in the Woods* (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849) dedication.

¹⁶⁴ Headley, *The Adirondack*, i.

¹⁶⁵ Headley, *The Adirondack*, iii.

¹⁶⁶ Headley, *The Adirondack*, 26, 43, 63.

¹⁶⁷ Headley, *The Adirondack*, 115-116, 168, 264.

¹⁶⁸ Hoffman, *Wild Scenes*, 1:14-15, 22-24.

¹⁶⁹ James McLelland and Bruce Selleck, "Mining in the Adirondacks," in *The Great Experiment in Conservation: Voices from the Adirondack Park*, William F. Porter, Jon D. Erickson, and Ross S. Whaley, eds. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009) 96.

¹⁷⁰ Emmons, *Geology of New-York*, 2: 218, 260.

¹⁷¹ Charles Lanman, *Adventures in the Wilds of the United States and British American Provinces* (Philadelphia: John W. Moore, 1856) 1:217, 220, passim.

¹⁷² S.H. Hammond, *Wild Northern Scenes; or Sporting Adventures with the Rifle and the Rod* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1857) 50, 56, 140, passim

¹⁷³ *The Opening of the Adirondacks. With a Map and Illustrations* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1865) 62-63, 64, 68

¹⁷⁴ H. Perry Smith, *The Modern Babes in the Woods; or, Summerings in the Wilderness. To Which is Appended a Reliable and Descriptive Guide to the Adirondacks* by E.R. Wallace (Hartford: Columbian Book Company, 1872) 32.

¹⁷⁵ S.R. Stoddard, *The Adirondacks Illustrated*, 10th ed. (Albany: Charles Van Benthuysen & Sons, 1881) 2, 4, passim.

¹⁷⁶ Schneider, *The Adirondacks*, 122-123. For a comprehensive history of Adirondack mining, see Patrick F. Farrell, *Through the Light Hole: A Saga of Adirondack Mines and Men* (Utica: North Country Books, 1996).

¹⁷⁷ The term “lumber frontier” comes from Thomas R. Cox, who writes that the first lumber frontier in the Mid-Atlantic U.S. was born at Glens Falls, New York—at the southern end of the Adirondacks—in 1763. Glens Falls became the collection point for logs cut from Adirondack soil, and it drove the wooden wealth of New York until the mid-1870s, when conservationist concerns started to snap at the timber industry’s heels. Thomas R. Cox, *The Lumberman’s Frontier: Three Centuries of Land Use, Society, and Change in America’s Forests* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2010) 94-100.

¹⁷⁸ Williams, *Americans & Their Forests*, 96; Schneider, *The Adirondacks*, 210; Cox, *This Well-Wooded Land*, 117; William F. Porter, “Forestry in the Adirondacks,” in *The Great Experiment in Conservation: Voices from the Adirondack Park*, William F. Porter, Jon D. Erickson, and Ross S. Whaley, eds. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009) 103-108; Schneider, *The Adirondacks*, 202, 216. For a detailed exploration of the connection between cutting hemlock (for their bark, integral to the tanning process) and the tanning industry, see Barbara McMartin, *Hides, Hemlocks and Adirondack History* (Utica: North Country Books, 1992).

¹⁷⁹ Harry Fenn, “Clearing a Jam, Great Falls of the Ausable,” in Bryant, *Picturesque America*, 2:418.

¹⁸⁰ Murray, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 16-17.

¹⁸¹ Headley, *The Adirondack*, 28-29.

¹⁸² Beginning with Roderick Frazier Nash’s *Wilderness & the American Mind* (1967), and running into the mid-1990s, wilderness was one of the key intellectual, cultural veins mined by environmental historians and ecocritics. Nash’s work set much of the research agenda: indeed, Oelschlaeger’s chapter on Henry David Thoreau in *The Idea of Wilderness* (1991), entitled “Henry David Thoreau: Philosopher of the Wilderness,” owes a good deal to Nash’s chapter, “Henry David Thoreau: Philosopher.” And Terrie’s first Adirondack book, *Forever Wild* (1994) self-consciously follows Nash’s lead. There are a few key attributes of the Nash-inspired school of wilderness: first, it tends to focus on the U.S.—which becomes problematic when someone like Oelschlaeger writes a book entitled *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* without ever stepping outside of the west, in general, and in the later half of the book, the U.S. in particular. The Nash school also sees the growth of wilderness appreciation as an unambiguous social good, and the same few characters, almost always Great White Men—Emerson, Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and a revolving handful of others including Bob Marshall, Dave Brower, Sigurd Olson, and others—stand as the high priests of the wilderness idea. There’s more or less a consensus that a definite, positive notion of wilderness emerges sometime in the mid-nineteenth century and is refined by succeeding generations of wilderness thinkers, a definition that crystallizes in the 1964 Wilderness Act. Finally, and most crucially, there’s an agreed, tacit assumption that wilderness is a real, tangible, material thing—though what, exactly, that thing is often gets lost in the mix—as well as a cultural idea that grows increasingly in accord to the material reality of wild nature. As Nash put it: “Wilderness was the basic ingredient of American culture. From the raw materials of the physical wilderness, Americans built a civilization. With the idea of wilderness they sought to give their civilization identity and meaning.”

There are all sorts of problems with the Nash version of history (though I want to point out the remarkable sensitivity that Nash, Oelschlaeger, and many of the old guard brought to the complicated shades of meaning that wilderness took, a sensitivity which gets lost when we try to reduce their insights to a few juicy sentences), problems that first broke in 1989 when Ramachandra Guha published an article in *Environmental Ethics* called “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique.” Guha’s article shook the world of environmental studies, and has caused waves throughout the academy. In a nutshell, Guha’s argument centers around Deep Ecology, an ecocentric wilderness philosophy hailing from the mid-1970s, and which has captivated a

wing of radical environmentalism, especially in the U.S. Guha argues, somewhat problematically, that “deep ecology is deeply American,”—despite the fact that the man often credited as its father, Arne Naess, is Norwegian—and more trenchantly that “the social consequences of putting deep ecology into practice on a worldwide basis...are very grave indeed.” This is the seed of the critique seeking to topple the Received Wilderness Idea.

William Cronon brought the debate to environmental history, and it’s no exaggeration to say that “The Trouble With Wilderness” marks a watershed in the way that historians think about wilderness. It was, I think, the proximate cause that made Terrie revise *Forever Wild*, published a year before Cronon’s epochal article, into *Contested Terrain*, and it was one of the articles that made me want to be an environmental historian. With “The Trouble With Wilderness,” the main course of historical thinking about wilderness, for American historians especially, suddenly jumped from Nash’s to Cronon’s channel, and one of the conceptual tools that Cronon used to divert the stream was the poststructuralist insight that wilderness is always a cultural conception, that one person’s wilderness is another person’s home, that wilderness—rather than a definite, material thing—is shifting. This then created a flood of new scholarship exposing how material reality did not square with the ideal, how white, elite, American conceptions of wilderness might be at odds with Native American, or African, or Indian, or the trapper’s and farmer’s and miner’s conception, or the conceptions of the poor, or squatters, or...the list is nearly endless.

Yet, despite the obvious differences between the *Wilderness in the American Mind* and “The Trouble with Wilderness” paradigms, they share many similarities, not least of which is that each tends to view wilderness dualistically: for Nash wilderness is good, and civilization is a very mixed blessing; while for Cronon, wilderness is “insidious,” and civilization, though flawed, basically good. Historiographically, too, the two camps root themselves in much of the same territory: the general outlines of the history of wilderness are the same (wilderness was once a feared place until the Romantics changed it in the mid-nineteenth century, etc.) as are the actors—the same bunch of elite white males. This thing that the *Wilderness in the American Mind* paradigm has identified and celebrated, and “The Trouble with Wilderness” paradigms has reidentified, critiqued, and reified, is the Received Wilderness Idea.

The term, “Received Wilderness Idea” comes from J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, whose two collections, *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (1998) and *The Wilderness Debate Rages On* (2008) are the essential sources for the debate over wilderness that began with Guha. But the trouble with the Received Wilderness Idea is its ahistoricity. Callicott and Nelson define, briefly, the Idea as what Jonathan Edwards, Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, Roosevelt, Leopold, Marshall, and Sigurd Olson deeded to posterity (though they change the cast of characters somewhat throughout the volumes). Yet the wilderness ideas of Emerson and Thoreau, to take just one example, are extraordinarily varied, complex, and more often than not, at odds with each other—this is, in fact, one of the first distinctions that one gleans from the scholarship on Transcendentalism. When Cronon picked up on the Received Wilderness Idea and transmitted it to environmental history, he did so only partially noting its complexities, and so the simplified Idea has become part of the foundation of the environmental history that follows the lead of “The Trouble With Wilderness.” In fact, it seems to me that Nelson, Callicott, Cronon and the other critics of the Received Wilderness Idea take the language of the 1964 Wilderness Act—“A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain,” a passage written by Howard Zahniser of the Wilderness Society—and read it backwards into the early-nineteenth century, a sort of present in search of a past, a present that paradoxically reifies the Idea even as it seeks its overthrow. It makes more sense to me to read the Wilderness Act in the context of the advent of the politics of environmentalism and environmentalist organizations in the post-World War II era, as Mark W.T. Harvey does in *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo park and the American Conservation Movement*. Murray Bookchin, though as stridently opposed to the Received Wilderness Idea as Callicott, Nelson, or Cronon, locates the birth of the Idea in a 1960s mystical New Age romanticism that had little intellectual underpinning. And remember that Guha’s critique, the thing that kicked off the rethinking of wilderness, was aimed at Deep Ecology, at the creation of legal wilderness preserves, at the pseudo-spiritual ecology of the 1960s and 1970s U.S., rather than *Walden* and *Nature*.

Of course, there are a number of intellectual threads that can be traced from the 1830 to the 1990s, but to distill their complexity into one Idea seems to me to be setting up an ideal only so that it can be torn down. That is to say, it seems to me to be setting up a straw man, and though I find much of Dave Foreman’s bluster to be, well, blustery, I think he’s onto something when he blasts the academic critics of wilderness for their oversight. It’s just not clear that the Received Wilderness Idea really existed in the minds of its supposed creators or its followers as coherently as many scholars tend to think—in fact, it’s pretty clear that most of the Idea’s supposed fathers articulated ideas that were actually quite contrary to the Idea. See Nash, *Wilderness & The American Mind*, xi; Ramachandra Guha, “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique,”

in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds., (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) 232; Cronon, "The Trouble With Wilderness," 73, 80-81, 83; Mark W.T. Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994) 4, 52-53; Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 17-18; Dave Foreman, "The Real Wilderness Idea," in *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate*, J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds., (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008) 381. For a brief selection of scholars who fall into something that we might consider "The Trouble With Wilderness" school, see Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Price, *Flight Maps*; Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001). For the "Received Wilderness Idea," see J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, "Introduction," in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds., (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) 2-4; Callicott, "The Wilderness Idea Revisited: The Sustainable Development Alternative," in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) 348-351.

¹⁸³ Schneider writes, "it was in the Adirondacks that masses of (non-Native) Americans first learned to cherish the wilds as a place of solace and recreation," and Roderick Frazier Nash agrees: "By the 1880s more had been written about the Adirondack country than any other wilderness area in the United States." See Schneider, *The Adirondacks*; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*; Terrie, *Forever Wild*, 4.

¹⁸⁴ Terrie's two books, *Forever Wild* and *Contested Terrain*, Graham's *The Adirondack Park*, and Schneider's *The Adirondacks* do a very good job, when taken together, of charting the major developments in the wilderness-as-empty story, and I won't concern myself with it here.

¹⁸⁵ Even the Romantics, traditionally understood as the folks who taught us to believe that wilderness must be empty of people to truly be wilderness, understood that humans belonged in the Great Northern Wilderness: "Unlike some of the conceptions of wilderness that would come later," writes Schneider, "the defining element for the romantics was not a total absence of humanity. However small, impotent, and awestruck in a corner of the cosmic canvas they might be, humans were nevertheless still there." Schneider, *The Adirondacks*, 164.

¹⁸⁶ Headley, *The Adirondack*, 194.

¹⁸⁷ Headley, *The Adirondack*, 21, 22-23. Yet, Headley was no radical, and I think can best be understood as a person who held a very complicated, ever-evolving spirit of reform. In 1873, Headley published a book entitled *The Great Riots of New York, 1712-1873*, a book that revolves around the Draft Riots of 1863, riots characterized by the extreme barbarity with which the rioters attacked black New Yorkers. Headley is entirely on the side of the riot's victims, and writes movingly of the attacks against African Americans. But he's unwilling to consider nuance, and his history takes the form of a stark contest between good and evil. The Irish rioters, in Headley's depiction, are ugly, brutish animals, the military and police force are written about with glowing prose, and he ultimately concludes that "five hundred or more of the most courageous, experienced, and efficient men from the police department" should be formed into a separate anti-riot task force. Furthermore, he's unwilling to even consider the injustice of the draft law that allowed the rich to buy their way out of military service for \$300. There's no structural critique of inequality, or privilege. Yet, I don't think it's entirely fair to dismiss Headley, either. It was extremely difficult, in 1873, to critique any of the policies, such as the draft, that contributed to the winning of the war. And his defense of African Americans, at a time when the burning debates over Reconstruction were ricocheting through the national discourse, are remarkable. See Joel T. Headley, *The Great Riots of New York, 1712 to 1873* (1873; repr., Miami: Mnemosyne Reprinting, 1969) 22.

¹⁸⁸ A notable exception is Phillip Terrie—who radically switches his takes on Hammond. See Terrie, *Forever Wild*, 66-67; and Terrie, *Contested Terrain*, 58-60.

¹⁸⁹ Hammond, *Wild Northern Scenes*, xi.

¹⁹⁰ Hammond, *Wild Northern Scenes*, vii.

¹⁹¹ Hammond, *Wild Northern Scenes*, viii.

¹⁹² Hammond, *Wild Northern Scenes*, xi.

¹⁹³ Headley, *The Adirondack*, 198; Hammond, *Wild Northern Scenes*, 27-29.

¹⁹⁴ Harrison, *Forests*, 156, 201; Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, 8; Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 24.

¹⁹⁵ Hammond, *Wild Northern Scenes*, 33-34.

¹⁹⁶ Hammond, *Wild Northern Scenes*, 157, 300.

¹⁹⁷ Hammond, *Wild Northern Scenes*, 310-313.

¹⁹⁸ Hammond, *Wild Northern Scenes*, 314-316.

¹⁹⁹ Hammond, *Wild Northern Scenes*, 316, 341.

²⁰⁰ Schneider, *The Adirondacks*, especially chapters 15, "At Play in the Great Longhouse," 175-191; 21, "Birth of a Great Camp," 241-258; and 22, "Haute Rustic," 259-276; and Terrie, *Contested Terrain*, 61-74.

²⁰¹ Smith, *The Modern Babes in the Woods*, 45, 121;

²⁰² Smith, *The Modern Babes in the Woods*, 59-60.

²⁰³ Susan Sontag writes brilliantly of the culture that grew up around tuberculosis, generated, especially, by the seeming randomness and incurability of the disease. She sees consumption as the first archetypal disease of modernity, and "with TB...the idea of individual illness was articulated...in the images that collected around the disease one can see emerging a modern idea of individuality." Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 1989) 30.

²⁰⁴ Gregg Mitman has recently explored the intersection of environmental and medical history, by focusing on allergies and air quality. Though his topic is different than my own, there are some obvious overlaps. Gregg Mitman, *Breathing Space: How Allergies Shape Our Lives and Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), especially chapter 1, "Hay Fever Holiday," 10-51

²⁰⁵ Marc Cook, *The Wilderness Cure* (New York: William Wood & Company, 1881) 9, 15, 17. Mitman also explores the confluence of tourism and health, though he tends to dismiss health-tourists for their economic privilege. While I think connecting landscape creation to health and economics is brilliant, I do think that he significantly overestimates the extent to which capitalism dominated every aspect of health, culture, and tourism. Mitman, *Breathing Space*.

²⁰⁶ Murray, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 12-14.

²⁰⁷ Robert Louis Stevenson was one of Trudeau's patients, as was Alfred L. Donaldson, the historian who I've relied on throughout this chapter. Schneider, *The Adirondacks* 167-168; Terrie, *Contested Terrain*, 65.

²⁰⁸ Cook, *The Wilderness Cure*, 17, 21, 30-31.

²⁰⁹ Cook, *The Wilderness Cure*, 36, 49, 57, 83-84

²¹⁰ McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, February 6, 1850; "The Smith Land," *The North Star*, February 18, 1848; Headley, *The Adirondack*, 198; Lanman, *Adventures in the Wilds*, 224; Hammond, *Wild Northern Scenes*, 84; John A. Hows, *Forest Pictures in the Adirondacks: With Original Poems by Alfred B. Street* (New York: James G. Gregory, 1864) 1; Murray, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 195.

²¹¹ Sweet, *Twilight Hours in the Adirondacks*, lines 19-20; Cook, *The Wilderness Cure*, 43; Perry, *The Modern Babes in the Wood*, 24.

²¹² *The Opening of the Adirondacks*, 25.

²¹³ As Conevery Bolton Valenčius has argued, "'Settling' meant, in all practical terms, cultivating." See Bolton, *The Health of the Country*, 193.

²¹⁴ Bolton, *The Health of the Country*, 109-111, 127.

²¹⁵ Indeed, this is the very first proposition in Nash's seminal *Wilderness & the American Mind*. See Nash, *Wilderness & the American Mind*, 1.

²¹⁶ Philosopher Wayne Ouderkirk, among others, has recently taken William Cronon and J. Baird Callicott to task for just such simplification. Ouderkirk, like Bookchin, like Harrison, argues instead that, "we continue to respect the wild because it is simultaneously something of which we are a part and which lives on in its own way." Humans are dialectically intertwined with what we are not, and to collapse the difference, to argue that there is no difference between the human and non-human is every bit as homogenizing as arguing that the human and the wild are mutually exclusive categories. See Wayne Ouderkirk, "On Wilderness and People: A View from Mt. Marcy," in *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate*, J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008) 450, 451, 454.

²¹⁷ The landscape architect and historian John Dixon Hunt has argued that the Western tradition of landscape architecture inherited from the Renaissance prizes continuity rather than discrete separation, a flowing from first nature—the non-human world—through second nature—the human-created landscape—and into third nature—the interventions, like landscaped gardens, that go beyond strictly utilitarian need. The point is that, rather than a strict division between city and country, wilderness and humanity, these things have a very long intellectual history of being understood as constituents of each other. This is not so different from what Doreen Massey is exploring in her masterful *For Space*, when she argues for a way of thinking through space and place that, instead of privileging a static set of essential characteristics, seeks to recover interaction, interrelationship. She writes, "What was evolved within the project of modernity, in other words, was the establishment and (attempted) universalisation of a way of

imagining space (and the space/society relationship) which underpinned the material enforcement of certain ways of organising space and the relationship between society and space.” I’m interested in that parenthetical thought of Massey’s, the attempt at universalization, and how it implies that there was always present a resistant negotiation. Of course, the mutually constructive relationship between dissimilar things is the at the root of Harrison’s *Forests*, as well as Bookchin’s *The Ecology of Freedom*, as well. See John Hunt Dixon, *In Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000) especially chapter 3, “The Idea of a Garden and the Three Natures,” 32-75; Massey, *For Space*, 65; Harrison, *Forests*; Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*.

²¹⁸ Headley, *The Adirondack*, 118.

²¹⁹ One of the most deeply nuanced and thought provoking essays that I’ve read on wilderness is Val Plumwood’s “Wilderness Skepticism and Wilderness Dualism,” in which she argues against the Received Wilderness Idea of wilderness as feminized, as empty, but *for* the idea of wilderness as feminine, as full of difference. She argues that we ought to understand virginity not as a potential waiting to be plucked, redeemed by a man’s hand, but as a thing unto itself, as free, as a woman who is her own person. Too much of the recent criticism of wilderness, she argues, either simply flips the dualistic categories, or collapses them—like Ouderkirk, hers is ultimately a critique of homogeneity and a celebration of difference. And like Ouderkirk, she argues that “To overcome this dualism we need to reclaim the ground of continuity, to recognize both the culture which has been denied in the sphere conceived as pure nature, and to recognize the nature which has been denied in the sphere conceived as pure culture. The traditionally dualistic wilderness concept delegitimizes both, denying the legitimacy or possibility of the hybrids and boundary crossings which break up the neatly regimented polarity of nature and culture, and which enable wilderness reserves to be understood as part of a continuum.” Val Plumwood, “Wilderness Skepticism and Wilderness Dualism,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds., (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) 655, 659, 669, 670, 679.

²²⁰ One of the best essays on wilderness that I’ve ever come across is Irene J. Klaver’s “Wild: Rhythm of Appearing and Disappearing,” an essay whose form has been exquisitely crafted to reflect the experience of the wild. The reader hoping for well-defined terms, logical arguments that transparently build one upon the other, and a linear progression of ideas would be best advised to turn back from Klaver’s piece, and head for tamer grounds. See Irene J. Klaver, “Wild: Rhythm of Appearing and Disappearing,” in *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate*, J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008) 485-499.

²²¹ One of the many triumphs of Cronon’s “The Trouble with Wilderness,” is that after all of the deconstructionist tearing down is done, he *does* argue that we need a new land ethic teaching us how to live honorably, healthfully, and peacefully on the earth. He even briefly offers the metaphor of home as an alternative to a wilderness in which we are supposed to “leave no trace.”

And yet, the trouble with deconstruction is that it’s not clear when it is safe to rebuild. Everything can be torn down, and of course, Cronon’s “home” is no more of a stable, value-neutral, universalizable ideal than wilderness. Millions of people throughout the world do not have the luxury of a home that is safe, or happy, or healthy, nor the wealth to live in the sort of home that Cronon seems to imagine. If we can deconstruct wilderness as unforgivably white, western, male, and bourgeois, then certainly the notion of the home with its backyard and tree, a notion of home that sounds awfully suburban and upper-middle-class, suffers from exactly the same collision with material reality as wilderness.

I think the underlying trouble with wilderness has less to do with what the word might mean, than with the desire for a firm grounding against which change can be empirically, efficiently, and truthfully measured. Many environmental historians, especially of the materialist strain, seek a sort of control state, but such a quest strikes me as quixotic. And so, as academics and cultural critics, rather than search for one master metaphor that works for all people, everywhere, at all times—virginal land, home, cybernetic system, Gaia—it seems better to me to ask: what cultural values do we find in our landscapes? what ones do we want to find? how can we create spaces—even if that means leaving them alone—that allow us to live honorably and justly in this world? And it’s just here that a nineteenth-century emphasis on a living, hybridized wilderness as the potential for a kinder, better, gentler, healthier world seems to me worth preserving.

I’ll be the first to admit that this approach privileges messy culture over any material scientific claim, social ecology over hard ecological science. I do realize that for those environmental historians who explicitly call themselves ecological historians, for those materialist environmental historians who rely on ecology for their epistemological grounding, ontological justification, and moral punch my approach may seem fatuous, a muddle of self-referential dialectics, even arrogantly anthropocentric. But one of the major lessons from Donald Worster’s

Nature's Economy is that cultural currents always float the seemingly stable and self-contained ship of ecology. More recently, ecologist Laura Martin, after reviewing 8040 articles from ten years' worth of academic ecology journals, has shown that the science of ecology itself takes as its underexamined normative condition that the "real" world is a world without humans in it. That is to say, much of scientific ecology is ideologically based on the Received Wilderness Idea. As Martin puts it, "Although less than 13% of Earth's ice-free land falls under some sort of legal protection...over 63% of study sites were situated in a protected area." And more strongly: "The most problematic aspect of the current site distribution is that the underrepresentation of lived-in landscapes in the mainstream ecological literature leaves us with little robust data about ecological relationships in our immediate habitat, the 75% of the terrestrial world most influenced by our actions.... If we recognize humans as embedded within ecosystems, there is no reason to limit the scope of ecology and conservation to the 13% of the globe that is protected. To restrict ecological research to protected areas alone is to misrepresent our world." And so it seems to me that there is a fundamental conceptual disjunct in using ecological science to unseat the Received Wilderness Idea, that ecology is a poor set of spectacles with which to examine wilderness. More importantly, it seems to me that neither scientific ecology, nor for that manner any absolute yardstick, may be all that useful in helping us humans to find our place in the landscape.

Of course, ecological history has brought us all sorts of wonderful insights, ones that I would not want to do without. Methodologically, ecological history seems to be a very robust critical tool that can help us see all sorts of inadequacies in the human-nature relationship, and critique is one of the first steps towards exploring better alternatives. But it seems to me that the environmental histories that hold the best promise for helping to actively create an honorable, just human place in the world are the ones that stretch the meaning of ecology from a narrowly scientific (and anti-humanistic) one to a holistic worldview. As Bookchin writes, "Once human society finally emerges as a distinct worldwide phenomenon, it becomes meaningless to speak of ecological issues in strictly biological terms. Indeed, like it or not, nearly every ecological issue is also a social issue."

These works that take ecology as a metaphor rather than a discipline are the ones that can help us see what Richard White has called "hybrid landscapes," landscapes that are both cultural and natural—as indeed all landscapes are. And indeed, one of the recent trends in environmental history—a trend that has been very well received—implicitly disavows the wilderness roots of ecology in favor of something that is more of a hybrid. I'm thinking of the confluence of medical and environmental history, works which see the human body itself as an ecology, works like Valenčius's *The Health of the Country*, Mitman's *Breathing Space*, Linda Nash's *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), and Nancy Langston's *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). See Worster, *Nature's Economy*; Laura J. Martin, Bernd Blossey, and Erle Ellis, "Mapping Where Ecologists Work: Biases in the Global Distribution of Terrestrial Ecological Observations," *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, *Front Ecol Environ* 2012; doi:10.1890/110154; Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 32; Richard White, "From Wilderness to Hybrid Landscapes: The Cultural Turn in Environmental History," *The Historian* 66 (Sept., 2004) 558, 564.

²²² George Washington Sears, "From the Misanthrope," in *Forest Runes* (New York: Forest and Stream Publishing Co., 1887) 78; Dan Brennan, ed., *Canoeing in the Adirondacks with Nessmuk: The Adirondack Letters of George Washington Sears* (Blue Mountain Lake: The Adirondack Museum/Syracuse University Press, 1993) 3-4.

²²³ Much thanks to Laura Wasowicz, the Curator of Children's Literature at the American Antiquarian Association for sharing with me her detailed knowledge of the publications history of *The Babes in the Woods*.

²²⁴ *The Babes in the Wood*. New York: McLoughlin Brothers, n.d. [1880-1882?].

²²⁵ According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the median household income for Franklin County was \$41,062 and \$42,053 for Essex. For comparison, the richest county in the state, Nassau County, had a median household income of \$90,294, over twice the income of both Franklin and Essex Counties. See "Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates," *U.S. Census Bureau*. <http://www.census.gov/did/www/saipe/county.html>, (accessed 4/22/2012).

²²⁶ The clause covers not only the Adirondacks, but also the State-owned lands in the Catskill Park. Graham's *The Adirondack Park* is still the indispensable reference for the legal history of the Park. See Chapter 15, "Forever Wild," 126-132.

²²⁷ Terrie, *Forever Wild*, 100-101.

²²⁸ Stradling, *The Nature of New York*, especially his introduction, "Nature Is on the Side of New York," 1-13.

²²⁹ Williams, *Americans & Their Forests*, 406; Cox, *This Well-Wooded Land*, 90-93; and especially Graham, *The Adirondack Park*, chapter XII, "The City Intervenes," 96-106. Terrie writes, "the aesthetic argument alone could

never have led to the preservation of the Adirondacks. Rather, it became just one more weapon in the arsenal of the utilitarian protectors of the watershed.” Terrie, *Forever Wild*, 101.

²³⁰ Julian Walbridge Rix, “Forest Destruction in the Adirondacks. The Effects of Logging and Burning Timber. A Feeder of the Hudson--As It Was. A Feeder of the Hudson-As It Is,” *Harper’s Weekly* 29 (January 24, 1885) 56.

²³¹ Frederick Douglass, “Address Before the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association,” in *African-American Social and Political Thought, 1850-1920*, Howard Brotz, ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1992) 288, 290, 291

²³² Indeed, there is a minor character in the novel, a politician from New Jersey named Peter Smith who supports the education of Alabama’s black sharecroppers, a politician who is notorious for “certain socialistic votes.” Recall that Gerrit Smith’s father was named Peter, and that Gerrit, like the fictional character, served in Congress for a brief spell. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, (1911, reprint. New York: Harlem Moon, 2004), 45.

²³³ Environmental writing is a brand-new category, and Bill McKibben is one of its inventors. The collection that he edited, *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau* (2002), is the first major canonical collection showcasing the new genre—and it, unfortunately, suggests the monochromatic way many scholars still view the outdoors: of 101 sanctified authors, only three—Marvin Gaye (in partnership with Joni Mitchell), Robert D. Bullard, and Carl Anthony—are African American. McKibben implies through omission that there was no environmental writing penned by a black author before the first Earth Day marked the emergence of modern environmentalism. If environmental writing is to be anything more than a way to sell books, then it must seek to broaden its scope, and both Douglass’s “Address Before the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association,” and DuBois’s *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* are easy starts. For an explanation, and representative offering, of what environmental writing is, how it is different than nature writing, and why we need a new genre, see Bill McKibben, ed., *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau* (New York: The Library of America, 2008).

²³⁴ DuBois, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, 33.

²³⁵ DuBois, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, 378.

²³⁶ “Gerrit Smith’s Lands,” *The North Star*, March 24, 1848.

NOTES TO ENTR’ACTE

¹ Archibald MacLeish, *Land of the Free* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938) 38-39. The image that MacLeish used is credited as “Crossroads in Illinois” from *The Daily Pantagraph*, from Bloomington, Illinois.

² I think that the surveyor Verplanck Colvin, whom Terrie refers to as “the single most knowledgeable and articulate spokesman for the region” was probably the person who most forcefully helped to create the image of the Adirondacks as empty wilderness. In 1872, Colvin was appointed Superintendent of the Adirondack Survey, a survey intended to create the first accurate and comprehensive map of the Adirondacks—a goal never realized. Since the late 1860s, Colvin had been calling for a forest preserve to maintain the watershed, the forests, and the recreational and nationalistic aspects of the wilderness. From his appointment in 1872, Colvin spent twenty-five years exploring the Great Northern Wilderness, filing annual reports along the way, many of which read like dime-novel adventure narratives: “The Adirondack wilderness may be considered the wonder and the glory of New York. It is a vast *natural* park, on immense and silent forest, curiously and beautifully broken by the gleaming waters of a myriad of lakes, between which rugged mountain ranges rise as a sea of granite billows. At the north-east the mountains culminate with an area of some hundreds of square miles; and here savage treeless peaks, towering above the timber line, crowd one another, and, standing gloomily shoulder to shoulder rear their rocky crests amid the frosty clouds. The wild beasts may look forth from the ledges on the mountain sides over unbroken woodlands stretching beyond the reach of sight – beyond the blue hazy ridges at the horizon. The voyager by canoe, beholds lakes in which these mountains and wild forests are reflected like inverted reality; now wondrous in their dark grandeur and solemnity; now glorious in resplendent autumn color or pearly beauty.” Colvin had the influence and the ear of businessmen, sportsmen associations, industry, and politicians. Terrie, *Forever Wild*, 77-91; Graham, *The Adirondack Park*, 70-71; Verplanck Colvin, *Report on the Topographical Survey of the Adirondack Wilderness of New York, for the year 1873* (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1874) 20.

³ W.J. Stillman, “Shed” in *Poetic Localities: Photographs of Adirondacks, Cambridge, Crete, Italy, Athens* (New York: Aperture, 1988) 31.

⁴ Currier & Ives, *The Soldier’s Grave* (NY: Currier & Ives, 1862).

⁵ Edward William Lane, trans., *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments; or, The Thousand And One Nights*, (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1944) 678.

⁶ From A.J. Russell, "Military Installations, Activities, and Views, Washington, D.C., Richmond, Va., and Vicinity," Library of Congress, LOT 11486-D, no. 21.

⁷ Murray, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 208-211, 215, 216-18, 227-228, 228-229, 230, 231-232.

⁸ A.J. Russell, *Photographs Taken During Construction of the Union Pacific Railroad*.

NOTES TO PART THREE

¹ Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006) 64

² Andrew Joseph Russell, "On the Mountains with the Tripod and Camera," *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin*, 1 (1870), 33; Gaston Tissandier, *A History and Handbook of Photography*, Translated from the French, J. Thomson, ed. (1878; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1973), 154; *Andrew J. Russell: Visual Historian* U-Matic (Brigham Young University Production, 1983). There's something very cosmically right about receiving a movie about Russell on U-Matic, a visual medium akin to VHS which never really caught on. To watch the movie, I was ushered in to a room which was more like a graveyard of visual technologies past: 8 and 16mm film projectors cluttered the shelves, a reel-to-reel VHS machine was there, and a few contraptions that I've never seen before. All of this to watch a video about trains and photographs.

³ Weston J. Naef, and James N. Wood, *Era of Exploration: The Rise of Landscape Photography in the American West, 1860-1885* (New York: Albright-Knox Gallery and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975), 201; Martha Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 77; Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 107; "American Artists," *Nunda News* (Nunda, New York) 2, 12, December 15, 1860.

⁴ Alan Trachtenberg, "Photography: The Emergence of a Keyword," in *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, Martha Sandweiss ed. (Fort Worth: Amon Center Museum, 1991), 26-27. The idea that one's image might literally stick to photographic film, though it sounds quaintly rusticated, has illustrious forbears. Oliver Wendell Holmes pointed out that the ancient natural philosophers Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius theorized that all bodies gave off essences of themselves, and Holmes himself writes, "Under the action of light, then, a body makes its superficial aspect potentially present at a distance, becoming appreciable as a shadow or as a picture." And the insistence continues to this day. Roland Barthes writes that, "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here." p. 81. See Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *The Atlantic Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Art, and Politics* 3, no. 20 (June, 1859), 738; and Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 81.

⁵ Ned Buntline, *Love at First Sight; or, The Daguerreotype. A Romantic Study of Real Life* (Boston: Lerow and Company, [1848?]) 9.

⁶ Tissandier, *A History and Handbook of Photography*, 6-7, 34-36, 149-150.

⁷ Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," 748.

⁸ A.J. Russell shot on a number of differently-sized glass negatives, but the most common size for his single railroad views was 10"x13." Barry B. Combs, *Westward to Promontory: Building the Union Pacific Across the Plains and Mountains; A Pictorial Documentary* (Palo Alto: American West Publishing, 1969) 18. William D. Pattison, "The Pacific Railroad Rediscovered," *Geographical Review* 52, 1 (Jan., 1962) 25-36; Glenn Willumson, "Photographing Under Difficulties": Andrew Russell's Photographs for the King Survey," in Toby Jurovics, Carol M. Johnson, Glenn Willumson, and William F. Stapp, *Framing the West: The Survey Photographs of Timothy H. O'Sullivan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) 234 n24.

⁹ W.H. Jackson, who was the official photographer for F.V. Hayden's 1870 Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories and along with Russell one of the preeminent landscape photographers of his day, wrote of the tribulations of outdoor photography, "working under a blazing sun, on a dry, parched, and dusty sage brush plain, my first taste of the realities of outdoor photography was not of the rose-water order." He even claims to have witnessed and survived a shoot-out; which he slept through. W.H. Jackson, "Field Work," *The Philadelphia Photographer* 12, no. 135 (March, 1875) 92, 93; Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982) 100-103.

¹⁰ Joel Snyder has a wonderful description of the material practice of making an outdoor photograph in the nineteenth century. See Joel Snyder, *One/Many: Western American Survey Photographs by Bell and O'Sullivan* (Chicago: The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, 2006) 75-79.

¹¹ This description of how one would prepare, make, and develop a glass-plate negative comes from Tissandier, *A History and Handbook of Photography*, 114-117, 122-123, 126-128, 130-133; Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the

Stereograph,” 740; and Oliver Wendell Holmes, “Doings of the Sunbeam.” *The Atlantic Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Art, and Politics* 12, no. 69 (July, 1863) 12.

¹² Russell, “On the Mountains with the Tripod and Camera,” 34. Russell’s photograph of the Tree can be found in F.V. Hayden, *Sun Pictures of Rocky Mountain Scenery, with a Description of the Geographical and Geological Features, and Some Account of the Resources of the Great West; Containing Thirty Photographic Views along the Line of the Pacific Railroad, from Omaha to Sacramento* (New York: Julius Bien, 1870), plate number XIX; A.J. Russell, *Photograph Albums of Utah, Wyoming, Nebraska, and California* (n.p.); A.J. Russell, *Photographs Taken During Construction of the Union Pacific Railroad* (n.p.: 1864-1869); and as stereographic views. Interestingly, there are three different views of the Tree taken by Russell, two of which, entitled *1000 Mile Tree, Looking South* and *1000 Mile Tree Gorge*, can, as far as I know, only be found as stereo views. The other, *1000 Mile Tree, Excursion Party*, is the same as the image I reproduce here.

¹³ From A.J. Russell, *Photographs Taken During Construction of the Union Pacific Railroad*.

¹⁴ The art of printing on albumen paper was literally dead until it was rediscovered in the late 1970s. James Reilly is the expert on how to make albumen photographs, and his book is wealth of information on early photographic practice. See James M. Reilly, *The Albumen & Salted Paper Book: The History and Practice of Photographic Printing, 1840-1895* (New York: Light Impressions Corporation, 1980).

¹⁵ Jonathan Bordo has noted that figures in landscape images are witnesses, often to the drawing of boundaries between wilderness and culture. He then goes on to suggest that, when humans are absent, trees often stand in for them. See Jonatahn Bordo, “Picture and Witness at the Site of Wilderness” in *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed., W.J.T. Mitchell, ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) 297, 299.

¹⁶ New York Public Library, *Tracking the West: A.J. Russell’s Photographs of the Union Pacific Railroad* (n.p.:1994), 4.

¹⁷ This photograph has been given various titles, and its grammar cleaned up. But the title scratched into the emulsion of the original negative reads *East and West Shaking Hands at Laying Last Rail*, and so that’s what I’ll refer to it as. Two other photographers also made views of the scene: Charles Savage and Alfred A. Hart. Because of the complexities of the ownership and attribution of authorship to nineteenth-century photos, Savage was often given credit for the iconic photo—and sometimes still is—until, in the early 1960s, William D. Pattison discovered a trove of Russell’s photos. He was essentially forgotten until Pattison’s find. See Pattison, “The Pacific Railroad Rediscovered,” 35.

¹⁸ From A.J. Russell, *Photographs Taken During Construction of the Union Pacific Railroad*.

¹⁹ Richardson, *West from Appomattox*, 77.

²⁰ A.J. Russell, “Correspondence: The Laying of the Last Rail on the Union Pacific Rail Road—Nunda is Honored with a Representation—Some Important Statements from Capt. Andrew J. Russell of Nunda,” *Nunda News* (Nunda, New York) 10, 22, May 29, 1869.

²¹ Susan E. Williams is Russell’s most prolific, most precise biographer. See Susan E. Williams, “‘Richmond Again Taken’: Reappraising the Brady Legend through Photographs by Andrew J. Russell,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 110, 4 (2002): 437-460; and, for a rich trove of biographical information, including background on Nunda, Susan E. Williams, “The Truth Be Told: The Union Pacific Railroad Photographs of A.J. Russell,” *View Camera* (January/February, 1996): 36-43 (quotation from page 38).

²² “No one could doubt the power of the railroad to transform,” writes Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher. “The late nineteenth-century West was inconceivable without the railroad.” Those are two extreme statements, bordering on technological determinism, but I think they’re both right. Like the introduction of the internet, the completion of the transcontinental railroad fundamentally altered the landscape of the US—and I’m using landscape in its broadest possible terms—as well as the world. Here’s just one example: the Central Pacific imported a large number of Chinese workers to grade their beds and light their dynamite charges. This not only altered the cultural makeup of California, a place already marked by its diversity, but eventually impacted international relations with the passage of things like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Or take Maury Klein’s words from his impressive biography of the Union Pacific: “[The transcontinental railroad] played a primary role in transforming the country from an agricultural to a complex industrial society...A significant part of American industry owed its early growth to a symbiotic relationship with the railroad. As the nation’s first big business, railroad corporations pioneered in new methods of finance and new forms of organization...As the first big businesses they became the model on which giant corporate enterprise was fashioned. In effect they introduced Americans to the whole Pandora’s box of industrialization.” Finally, Sarah H. Gordon writes that the railroads fundamentally changed the US by “raising hopes that trade and travel would bring economic betterment and unite a far-flung society, the railroads uprooted

and reorganized populations, changed the size, structure, and purpose of towns, altered the distribution of wealth, created new national hierarchies, and ultimately raised a great many questions about the terms on which a diverse people would tolerate national unity." See Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 274-275; Maury Kline, *Union Pacific* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 1:xi; Sarah H. Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996) vii. On the completion of the railroad as a sign of American triumphal exceptionalism (the title gives a pretty good hint to the content holds), see Stephen Ambrose, *Nothing Like it In the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad, 1863-1869* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

²³ As will become clear, I am very interested in the tension, in the gap between images and words, between fact and meaning. One can argue that since Russell wrote, and at times made images, so triumphally sure about the railroads, then all his photographs must be likewise triumphal, that his words fix the meaning of his photographs. But because Russell was a painter and a photographer, because the way he related to the world and expressed himself most intimately was through visual media, I will therefore privilege his images at least as much if not more than his written statements. Barbara Novak writes, "This verbal textualization of the visual, frequently ushering into exile any kind of formalist methodology, has aided the dephysicalization of the art object. Art historians have always had the difficulty of fashioning words to deal with wordless objects. But this has been further problematized by those readings of the object that lend themselves to extended exegeses of a literary nature. This is one of the most serious issues confronting the art historian." "Real art has the capacity to make us nervous," writes Susan Sontag. "By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, comfortable." I'd argue that it's even easier to tame art if you don't look at it all, but instead focus your attention on the caption or surrounding literary context. And so there's no reason, except fear, that verbal acuity needs to be the only measure of meaning or intent. See Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) xi; and Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation" in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 8; for an example of the dangers of oversimplification that come with interpreting photographers without paying attention to their photographs (what historian would critique John Muir based solely on the images gracing the covers of his books, without digging deeply into his text?), see Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo, "Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race: Carleton Watkins, John Muir, and the Construction of Wilderness," in *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate*, Michael P. Nelson and J. Baird Callicott, eds. (Athens: The university of Georgia Press, 2008) 189-127.

²⁴ Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 4; Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (New York: Viking, 2003) 91-92; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 37-38, 42; Berger and Mohr, *Another Way of Telling*, 86, 121, 133, passim.

²⁵ Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," 747.

²⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 88-91, 96, 117. I once fell in love with a photograph. It was in an old German iron-cross cemetery, somewhere north of Minot, North Dakota. A woman in all her wedding finery, and who seemed to be my age when her picture was taken, stared out at me from the photographic likeness fixed to her monument. There was no name, and no possible chance of introduction, just an aching sense of sadness that the photograph was only of a ghost.

²⁷ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, write "objectivity is a morality of prohibitions rather than exhortations." See Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, "The Image of Objectivity" *Representations* 40 (1992), 107, 117-118, 122.

²⁸ Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 27.

²⁹ Many, including Oliver Wendell Holmes, saw this particular application of the photograph as part of the medium's utopian potential. See Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Doings of the Sunbeam," 11: Tissantier, *A History and Handbook of Photography*, 327. See also Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, Richard Bolton, ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989) 343, 345, passim.

³⁰ Keith F. Davis, *The Origins of American Photography: From Daguerreotype to Dry Plate, 1839-1885* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 49. Alan Trachtenberg eloquently writes of the Zealey photographs that "Without a public mask to mediate their encounter with the lens, the eyes of the enslaved Africans can only reveal the depths of their being – for, as naked slaves, they are permitted no social persona...Above all, the pictures suggest a potentially subversive power within the daguerrean effect of immediacy – including its eroticism – a power to

subvert the very conventions of portraiture which the works of commercial studios shaped." Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 56.

³¹ Thoreau, *Walden*, 364.

³² Edgar Allen Poe, "The Daguerreotype," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, Alan Trachtenberg, ed. (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980) 37.

³³ Credit is often given to Asa Whitney as the first to dream up a transcontinental railroad, but his work began ten years after Plumbe's.

³⁴ John Plumbe, *Memorial Against Mr. Asa Whitney's Railroad Scheme* (Washington: Buell & Blanchard, 1851), 20.

³⁵ John Plumbe, Jr., *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin, Taken during a Residence of Three Years in those Territories* (1839; repr., Iowa City: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1948), v, vi; Clifford Krainik, "National Vision, Local Enterprise: John Plumbe, Jr. and the Advent of Photography in Washington, D.C." *Washington History: Magazine of the Washington Historical Society of Washington*, D.C. (Fall/Winter, 1997/1998), 7.

³⁶ Plumbe, *Sketches*, 78-79.

³⁷ Plumbe, *Memorial*, 32, *passim*.

³⁸ Davis, *The Origins of American Photography*, 24; Krainik, "National Vision, Local Enterprise," 9.

³⁹ Partly this was due to the quality that a Plumbe daguerreotype could deliver, and he won a number of medals and premiums for "the most beautiful colored Daguerreotypes and best Apparatus ever exhibited." But a great deal of Plumbe's fame stems from his business acumen: he pioneered the franchise, and opened branches of the Plumbe National Daguerrian Gallery and Photographic Depots in fifteen cities, including Paris, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, and St. Louis. He also pioneered brand name appeal, having every daguerreotype impressed, "PLUMBE." And like Matthew Brady after him, Plumbe rarely seems to have operated a camera himself. Rather he hired cameramen, supplied the space, chemicals, and equipment, and claimed the work as his own. And so he pioneered another facet of the early photographic industry: the effacement of the identity of the actual cameraman, who was often considered a technician, merely. See John Doggett, Jr., *The Great Metropolis; or Guide to New York for 1846* (New York: H. Ludwig, 1846), 118; Krainik, "National Vision, Local Enterprise," 11, 15; Barbara McCandless, "The Portrait Studio and the Celebrity: Promoting the Art," in *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, Martha Sandweiss, ed. (Fort Worth: Amon Center Museum, 1991), 52.

⁴⁰ "A Visit to Plumbe's Gallery," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle and Kings County Democrat* 5, 160 (July 2, 1846).

Though anonymous, this article is often credited to Walt Whitman. In a nicely circular way, Plumbe would repay the compliments to Whitman. The daguerreotypist who took the image of Whitman as a young tough—the image that one found on the flyleaf of the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*—was trained by Plumbe, and the ability to reproduce a daguerreotype through lithography was first pioneered by him as well. So it's not too much of a stretch to assert that the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* bears Plumbe's imprint. See Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, 280-282, 284.

⁴¹ John R. Plumbe, *The Settlers and Land Speculators of Sacramento* (New York: n.p.; 1851), 7, 13.

⁴² See, for instance, Hine and Faragher, *The American West*, 280.

⁴³ Plumbe, *Memorial*, 2-3, 23.

⁴⁴ "A Visit to Plumbe's Gallery," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle and Kings County Democrat*.

⁴⁵ A.J. Russell, "Photographic Reminiscences of the Late War," *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* 13, (1882) 212.

⁴⁶ Russell, "Photographic Reminiscences of the Late War," 212.

⁴⁷ "Panorama of the War," *Nunda News* (Nunda, New York) 3, 11, December 14, 1861.

⁴⁸ Martha Sandweiss convincingly explodes the myth that photography instantly changed the world. Rather, because it was so vastly different from any other art form, it took a good deal of time to supplant lithography and panoramas as the preeminent visual art form. Furthermore, early photographers appropriated many of the narrative and iconic techniques from these older art forms into photography. See *Print the Legend*, especially chapter 2, "Of Instructions for Their Faithfulness": Panoramas, Indian Galleries, and Western Daguerreotypes," 48-86.

⁴⁹ Williams, "Richmond Taken Again," 437-438.

⁵⁰ Herman Haupt, *Reminiscences of General Herman Haupt* (Milwaukee: Wright & Joys Co., 1901) 256; Charles F. Cooney, "Andrew J. Russell: The Army's Forgotten Photographer," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 21 (April, 1982) 33.

⁵¹ New York Public Library, *Tracking the West*, 4. Williams, "Richmond Again Taken," 438, 442-445.

⁵² A.J. Russell, *Gen'l H. Haupt*, Library of Congress, LOT 9209, no. 21. This can also be found in Haupt, *Reminiscences of General Herman Haupt*.

⁵³ Haupt, *Reminiscences of General Herman Haupt*, 286.

⁵⁴ From A.J. Russell, "Military Installations, Activities, and Views, Washington, D.C., Richmond, Va., and Vicinity," Library of Congress, LOT 11486-H, no. 11.

⁵⁵ "Panorama," *Nunda News*.

⁵⁶ "Capt. Russell Photographing Battle Scenes," *Nunda News* (Nunda, New York) 5, 37, June 13, 1863.

⁵⁷ From A. J. Russell, "Military Installations, Activities, and Views, Washington, D.C., Richmond, Va., and Vicinity," Library of Congress, LOT 11486-C, no. 17.

⁵⁸ Russell, "Photographic Reminiscences of the Late War," 212, 213.

⁵⁹ A.J. Russell, "Photographic Reminiscences of the Late War," 213.

⁶⁰ "Panorama of the War," *Nunda News*.

⁶¹ From A.J. Russell, "Military Installations, Activities, and Views, Washington, D.C., Richmond, Va., and Vicinity," Library of Congress, LOT 11486-A, no. 8

⁶² From A.J. Russell, "Military Installations, Activities, and Views, Washington, D.C., Richmond, Va., and Vicinity," Library of Congress, LOT 11486-A, no. 8

⁶³ From A.J. Russell, "Military Installations, Activities, and Views, Washington, D.C., Richmond, Va., and Vicinity," Library of Congress, LOT 11486-B, no.6.

⁶⁴ From A.J. Russell, "Military Installations, Activities, and Views, Washington, D.C., Richmond, Va., and Vicinity," Library of Congress, LOT 11486-A, no. 7.

⁶⁵ This scene is constructed and adapted from a number of sources: S.J. Sedgwick letter, June 16, 1871. MS. S.J. Sedgwick Collection, 1868-1895. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 1, Folder 1; S.J. Sedgwick to J.W. Miner, June 12, 1875. MS. S.J. Sedgwick Collection, 1868-1895. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 1, Folder 1; and S.J. Sedgwick, 280 Nights! Broadside. ND. S.J. Sedgwick Collection, 1868-1895. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 3, Folder 22. What appears in quotation marks is not a direct quotation: I've adapted the speaker's more fragmentary notes to a coherent narrative, and though I've cleaned up the language and added a few sentences where I think the speaker would have extemporized, my scene remains very close to the originals.

⁶⁶ Again, I've adapted this bit of narrative from S.J. Sedgwick, *Announcement of Prof. S.J. Sedgwick's Illustrated Course of Lectures and Catalogue of Stereoscopic Views of Scenery in all Parts of the Rocky Mountains, between Omaha and Sacramento, taken by the Photographic Corps of the U.P.R.R. of which Prof. Sedgwick was a Member, for Union Pacific Railroad, at a Cost of Over \$10,000* (New York: Metropolitan Printing and Engraving Establishment, 1873); S.J. Sedgwick, *Prof. Sedgwick's Illuminated Lectures Across the Continent, 1879-'80* (New York: S.J. Sedgwick, 1879). S.J. Sedgwick Collection, 1868-1895. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 1, Folder 10; S.J. Sedgwick to William E. James, June 23, 1875. MS. S.J. Sedgwick Collection, 1868-1895. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 1, Folder 1.

⁶⁷ John R. Stilgoe, *Landscape and Images* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 257. As much as I love the convenience of digital photography, the ease with which I can hook up a digital projector to my laptop and glance over photographed mementos of past experiences, the best of these images cannot compare to the evocativeness of my old slide projector and a 35mm slide. Everyone I have ever showed my slides to has agreed that real light, not whatever sallow thing it is that shines out of a liquid crystal display, is bewitching.

⁶⁸ "Thus, [photographs] trade simultaneously on the prestige of art and the magic of the real. They are clouds of fantasy and pellets of information." Sontag, *On Photography*, 69.

⁶⁹ Stilgoe, *Landscape and Images*, 277.

⁷⁰ Berger and Mohr, *Another Way of Telling*, 88, 116.

⁷¹ Sedgwick, *Prof. Sedgwick's Illuminated Lectures Across the Continent, 1879-80*. I've only changed one word in this quotation, to ease reading.

⁷² Any study of Russell must begin with Susan Danly Walther's dissertation, which is a wealth of information. See Sunsa Danly Walther, "The Landscape Photographs of Alexander Gardner and Andrew Joseph Russell," Diss (Brown University, 1983) 65-66.

⁷³ See A.J. Russell, *The Great West Illustrated in a Series of Photographic Views Across the Continent; Taken Along the Line of the Union Pacific Railroad, West from Omaha, Nebraska. With an Annotated Table of Contents Giving a Brief Description of Each View; Its Peculiarities, Characteristics, and Connection with the Different Points of the Road*. Vol. 1 (New York: Office, 20 Nassau Street, 1869) (there never was a volume two); A.J. Russell, *Union Pacific R.R. Views* (n.p.: n.d.); F.V. Hayden, *Sun Pictures of Rocky Mountain Scenery*, supplements to *Geo. W.*

Williams & Co.'s Carolina Fertilizer with Twenty Photographic Views from the Line of the Union Pacific Railroad (Charleston: s.n., 1869), A.J. Russell, *Photographs Taken During the Construction of the Union Pacific Railroad, 1864-1869*. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; A.J. Russell, *Photograph Albums of Utah, Wyoming, Nebraska, and California*, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; and later as a series of stereographic cards entitled *Union Pacific R.R. Stereoscopic Views and Pacific R.R. Views Across the Continent West from Omaha* (often credited to O.C. Smith, who obtained the negatives in 1875 and published them under his own name). Trying to establish the provenance of stereoscopic images is not an easy task. First of all, stereoscopic slides were the baseball cards of their day: ephemera that wasn't deemed to be art, and therefore not worthy of collecting. And because photography itself was not considered an art, but merely a technical process, authorship was not important and copyrights unknown. This means that collections of slides are often amalgamations of different artists' work, gathered together by a distributor, and sold under the distributor's name. Furthermore, one rarely bought entire stereoscopic sets, but rather ordered the prints that seemed interesting. And finally, stereographic cards were not really considered legitimate objects of scholarly interest until the late 1970s. So there are no complete sets of Russell's stereoscopic views to be found, as far as I know. As if to underscore this point, the New York Public Library, which had a copy of *Union Pacific R.R. Stereoscopic Views*, lost it, and they no longer list it in their online catalog. It does seem that S.J. Sedgwick, who distributed Russell's slides and traveled with him 1869, collected many of Russell's images. Finally, tracking the reception of Russell's images—a task that is beyond the scope of this chapter—would be a daunting, and fascinating, project. For instance, when Sir William Clayton travelled the US in 1871 and 1872, he kept a diary in which he cut out single views from Russell's stereoscopic views and pasted them into his running narrative. See Sir William Clayton, "American Notes for Travel," 1871-1872, MS. Henry E. Huntington Library; S.J. Sedgwick, *Announcement of Prof. S.J. Sedgwick's Illustrated Course of Lectures and Catalogue of Stereoscopic Views*; William D. Pattison, "Westward by Rail with Professor Sedgwick: A Lantern Journey," *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 42, 4 (Dec., 1960) 336; Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," 747; John S. Waldsmith, *Stereo Views: An Illustrated History and Price Guide* (Radnor, PN: Wallace-Homestead Book Company, 1991) 51-52. The best information on Russell's railroad stereoviews can be found online at the Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum, http://cprh.org/Museum/Russell_Catalog.html (accessed 5/20/2011).

⁷⁴ Russell, *The Great West Illustrated*. There are no page numbers in this text. The above quotations can be found on the title page, and in the "Preface." Subsequent citations will be to plate numbers. Also, though a second volume was planned, it never materialized.

⁷⁵ From Russell, *The Great West Illustrated*.

⁷⁶ Barbara Novak has argued that the lone figure can either invite one into the frame – as I would argue it does here – or shut us out by keeping us from seeing what it sees. And though, overwhelmingly, Novak wants to incorporate mid nineteenth-century American art into a culture of optimism, she does concede that these figures can seem like "intruders in the Garden of Creation." See Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 198, and more generally chapter 8, "Man's Traces: Axe Train, Figure."

⁷⁷ It is not at all clear who wrote the text for *The Great West Illustrated*; some have credited Russell, though given the lowly status of photographers, and the narrative disjunction between text and image, I doubt this attribution.

⁷⁸ Susan Danly has argued that images of the railroad are images of the technological progress and capitalism, that images of the railroad in the West are always images of Manifest Destiny. "Photography," she writes, "was the principle medium through which the aesthetics of travel developed, both as advertisements and as travelers' personal mementos." I don't necessarily disagree with this, except to point out that a photograph can explicitly play with these assumptions, thwart these desires. John Berger and Jean Mohr write that, "A photograph is a meeting place where the interests of the photographer, the photographed, the viewer, and those who are using the photograph are often contradictory. These contradictions both hide and increase the natural ambiguity of the photographic image." And Leo Marx points out that one way to uncover the ambiguity that is hidden in plain sight is to pay attention to the photographed landscape—though he is skeptical that one will ever find any sustained, overt resistance to the hegemony of capitalism. So, for instance, iconologically, locomotives tend to convey a sense of power, of technological mastery over nature, not the caboose, as we see in *1000 Mile Tree*. This is just one example of the many elements in this photograph that ought to dissuade one from the too-easy conclusion that trains in the West are always triumphal images of dominance.

In one of the most provocative and useful works on reading photographs I've found, Berger and Mohr meditate on the relationships that photographs capture: the longing glance, the stolen kiss, the face contorted by fury. These captured moments are things that the audience can recognize, can sympathize with, and these are the

very things that make photographs important, make them treasured possessions. There's an easy way to demonstrate this: find a picture of your lover, child, or best friend, a photograph in which this person has been caught sharing a moment, a moment that, you know, captures something essential about that person. Now cut that person's eyes out. It sounds ghastly, right? This is an example of what Berger refers to as private photographs: those that are treasured as mementoes, as remembrances by those who were part of the scene. These are the photos that aren't removed from their immediate context, the snapshots that we look back on and say, "Oh, I remember Jon had just told the funniest joke, and we're laughing uproariously. That was the night of my 30th birthday party."

Public photos, though, the ones that get released to a wider audience, the photos that I'm concerned with in this chapter, are another matter. Martha Sandweiss also makes the distinction between public and private, but it's more simplified than Berger and Mohr's: "The public photographs that are the focus of this book were designed for widespread consumption, and intended to pass before the eyes and into the hands of strangers. Most were made with an awareness of the marketplace, with a calculated attention to what would please a patron or appeal to a prospective buyer or reader." Sandweiss is articulating a classic argument that has been in circulation since Alfred Stieglitz's Photo-Secession sought to delineate exactly what it was about photography that made it an art. Since then, and especially during the 1970s when the Director of Photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art, John Szarkowski labored mightily to declare photography, once and for all, an art form, many critics seemed to agree that taking pictures for money was inherently non-artistic. It was selling out. Think about fashion photography: can advertising be art? Would you see it on the walls of MoMA? Too often, commercial photographers are seen as technicians, while the heroic artist struggles alone with (usually) his muse. Many of Janet Malcolm's essays collected in *Diana & Nikon* show a similar disdain (as do, to a lesser extent, some of Sontag's work in *On Photography*).

But Berger isn't content to let the public slide so easily into the commercial. Instead, he writes, "it might be possible to begin to use photographs according to a practice addressed to an alternative future. This future is a hope which we need now, if we are to maintain a struggle, a resistance, against the societies and culture of capitalism." We can do this, Berger argues, by reanimating public photographs, making them "an integral part of the process of people making their own history." This would reinsert photographs in something of their original contingency, a "living context," so that "they would continue to exist in time, instead of being arrested moments. It is just possible that photography is the prophecy of a human memory yet to be socially and politically achieved." We critics do this by "constructing a context for a photograph...construct it with words...construct it with other photographs...construct it by its place in an ongoing text of photographs and images." Berger's is a theory of photography, and history, where the past isn't safely dead and gone, an object for analysis solely, but always present, more akin to a living memory, one that is always in the dialectical process of construction and reconstruction, one that strives, always, to be "seen in terms which are simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday, and historical." Or in other words, in a way that dissolves the false boundary between private photographs (or histories) meaningless to anyone besides the original parties and public photos (or histories), which are only ever capitalistic emanations.

My own practice in this chapter is an extended attempt, in part, to deal with some of the challenges raised by Susan Sontag's provocative, and bleak, *On Photography*. It's worth quoting her at length: "A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex. And it needs to gather unlimited amounts of information, the better to exploit natural resources, increase productivity, keep order, make war, give jobs to bureaucrats. The camera's twin capacities, to subjective reality and to objectify it, ideally serve these needs and strengthen them. Cameras define reality in two ways essential to the workings of an advanced industrial society: as a spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers). The production of images also furnishes a ruling ideology. Social change is replaced by a change in images. The freedom to consume a plurality of images and goods is equated with freedom itself. The narrowing of free political choice to free economic consumption requires the unlimited production and consumption of images." Sontag, to her great credit, does leave this door open: "If there is a better way for the real world to include the one of images, it will require an ecology not only of real things, but of images as well" (it's worth pointing out that Berger's "On Photography," the essay that I've quoted from extensively in this note, is motivated by a reaction to Sontag's *On Photography*, and that I'm pretty sure his practice that I outline above is also a theory and performance of visual ecology). This is my attempt at just such an ecology. Susan Danly, "Introduction," in *The Railroad in American Art: Representations of Technological Change*, Susan Danly and Leo Marx, eds. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988) 6, 17, 31; Leo Marx, "The Railroad-in-the-Landscape: An Iconological Reading of a Theme in American Art," in *The Railroad in American Art: Representations of*

Technological Change, Susan Danly and Leo Marx, eds. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988) 192-197; Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 4-7; Janet Malcolm, *Diana & Nikon: Essays on Photography* (New York: Aperture, 1997); John Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling* (New York: Vintage International, 1982) 7, 79, 108-109; John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1980) 55-56, 60-67; Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977) 178-179, 180. For an example of something that also tries to get at an ecology of images, see Louis P. Masur, "Reading Watson and the Shark," *The New England Quarterly* 67.3 (September, 1999): 427-454; and Louis P. Masur, *The Soiling of Old Glory: The Story of a Photograph that Shocked America* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008).

⁷⁹ From Library of Congress, LOT 3037, no. 5.

⁸⁰ Heather Cox Richardson notes that, in the post war years, a middle-class notion of individualism based on hard work, one that, paradoxically, relied on a strongly interventionist government for support and rejected the notion of systematic inequality, became the predominant political, cultural, and ethical fixation in the US. It's the American Dream: anybody, with a little elbow grease, can make it. Richardson notes that the major reason the Dream could survive was due to the myth of the West as a land conquered by strong individuals, the land of opportunity for hardworking average folks. Everyone who earned their bread by the honest sweat of their brow, despite their income, could be part of this middle class, and so picturing Reed as a sort of average man wasn't necessarily dissonant at all. See Richardson, *West From Appomattox* 4, 5, 92, 106, 110, 230, 342.

⁸¹ From Russell, *The Great West Illustrated*.

⁸² This desire and power of the photograph is something Roland Barthes calls "punctum." It is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me." Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26-27; Berger and Mohr, *Another Way of Telling*, 117-118, 128-129.

⁸³ Russell loved to tell stories, with himself as the hapless protagonist, and many of them have to deal with the recalcitrance of mules. "New York Correspondence," *The Philadelphia Photographer* 7 (1870): 82; A.J. Russell, "Letter from Mormondom," *Nunda News* (Nunda, New York) 10, 34, August 21, 1869.

⁸⁴ *Andrew J. Russell: Visual Historian*.

⁸⁵ Snyder points out that many western photos made by O'Sullivan and Bell are "roadblocks" in that they don't conform to the picturesque, sublime, or beautiful. But, instead of pursuing this observation, he lets it lie. "For reasons we can only guess at, neither Bell nor O'Sullivan made photographs that strained to achieve picturesque effects, or labored to show the West as a comforting extension of the East." I'm not going to extend my analysis to Bell and O'Sullivan, and at this point only want to point out that Russell's photographs, too, can be seen as roadblocks. Snyder, *One/Many*, 27-28.

⁸⁶ *The Nunda News* notes of one landscape painting in particular, a painting of the Cohocton Valley near Bath, New York, that it was remarkable for its "exceedingly truthful...representation," of perfectly bountiful harvests, lush, inviting forests, and softly beautiful blue skies. "American Artists," *Nunda News*.

⁸⁷ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Adam Phillips, ed. (1757; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 107.

⁸⁸ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 36.

⁸⁹ An important twist on the classic Burkean sublime can be seen in a good deal of American landscape painting—think of Leutze's *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*. It's a sort of human sublime in which the landscape is still awe-inspiring, but it's being conquered by even more awe-inspiring common folks. That is to say, the sublime can be, and often was, coopted into nationalist celebration. Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry*, 79-83.

⁹⁰ William Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery and Other Woodland Views*, Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, ed. (Edinburgh: Fraser & Co., 1834) 1: 45, 47, 49-53; Sir Uvedale Price, *On the Picturesque: With an Essay on the Origin of Taste, and Much Original Matter*, Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, ed. (Edinburgh: Caldwell, Lloyd, and Co., 1842) 60-62. The picturesque as an aesthetic is closely related to the aesthetic of the pastoral, and it might not even be the best idea to suggest that they are distinct traditions, but rather that they shade very gradually into each other, such that it is difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins. As Leo Marx notes, though, the pastoral was originally a literary convention that transubstantiated itself into a political, social, and spatial ideal towards the end of the 18th century. The most relevant point of overlap is that the pastoral likewise sought a harmonious middle ground in which nature and human culture mingled amicably. Pastoral landscapes tended to be inseparable mixes of human and natural—indeed the most stereotypically pastoral scene was the one in which a shepherd reclined beneath the shade of a gently overhanging tree and watched his flock as it wandered through a forest-ringed farm fields. Perhaps the most salient difference between the two is that though the pastoral, by the late 18th century, could be a visual aesthetic, the picturesque was primarily visual, though it could be experienced by the other senses, as

well. "That term [picturesque], as we may judge from its etymology, is applied only to objects of sight," writes Price, "I am well convinced...that the qualities which make objects picturesque...are...extended to all our sensations by whatever organ they are received." Nevertheless, its power was understood by many to depended almost entirely on sight. Like the picturesque, and the sublime, the pastoral comes rife with ideological connotations, many of which I deal with throughout the dissertation. Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 73; Price, *On the Picturesque*, 79.

⁹¹ Price, *On the Picturesque*, 504-510.

⁹² From Russell, *The Great West Illustrated*.

⁹³ Russell, *The Great West Illustrated*.

⁹⁴ In the summer of 1869, Russell bumped into Clarence King and his Geological Exploration of the 40th Parallel. Timothy H. O'Sullivan was the official photographer for the King expedition, but Russell joined it for three weeks, and made "a great many magnificent views in this vicinity," all of which, until very recently, have been credited to O'Sullivan. The larger point is that I think Russell's and King's sensibilities—their artistic vision, as well as their taste for adventure, and their humility—complemented each other. As Aaron Sachs has shown, one of King's enduring intellectual legacies was his willingness to decenter an anthropocentric model of the world. King was a catastrophist, not of the old-school Biblical variety who believed in the Flood and that the earth was created in 4004 BCE, but a newer, scientific version who nonetheless believed that nature lurched from one massive upheaval to the next. Volcanoes exploded, ice-dams burst, climactic patters suddenly shifted. Against such awesome power human might seemed a straw in the wind. Catastrophism is a notion of natural power that has its aesthetic counterpart in the sublime. King's "key lesson turned out to be one of humility—and caution," writes Sachs, and as I'll argue, it's also an ethic at work in Russell's photographic aesthetic. A.J. Russell, "Rocky Mountain Adventure," *Nunda News* 10, 27, September 25, 1869; Sachs, *The Humboldt Current* 246-251; For a reattribution of Russell's photos initially credited to O'Sullivan, see Willumson, "Photographing Under Difficulties," 175-185.

⁹⁵ The equation of the sublime, beautiful, and especially the picturesque with accommodation has gained increasing steam with the popularity of post-colonial critiques. "The picturesque was the political expression of social containment," writes Angela Miller: it consolidated a white, middle class social identity and agenda; reconciled the contradictions between a glorification of wilderness and capitalism destruction of it; and makes social critique nearly impossible. In her vision, Thomas Cole is almost the only American landscape artist who isn't simply a stooge of capitalism's omnipotent ideology. Indeed, the picturesque as a cloak softening the brutal outlines of capitalist exploitation has become more or less the dominant view. David Stradling's discussion of landscape art in nineteenth-century New York State argues that artists "followed remarkably firm rules of composition," rules dictated by the marketplace. These images, then, "were lessons...on how to view nature, how to frame a picturesque vista, how to appreciate the power of God by contemplating wild landscapes." There's remarkably little room, in any of this, for individual interpretation. William Cronon has argued that our modern notion of wilderness was born of the marriage between the frontier, and the sublime. Peter Bacon Hales, while arguing that, in the long view photography tended to unify science, art, and capitalism in a celebratory take on Progress, notes that this vision eventually lost its stable center, and out of it spun two alternate stances: one capitalized and highly stylized, the other resistant. I'd argue, of course, that the resistance is not necessarily logically secondary, but is there from the first. Among the works which are applicable to this chapter, see, for instance Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) 11-16; Angela L. Miller, "The Fate of Wilderness in American Landscape Art: The Dilemmas of 'Nature's Nation,'" in *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*, Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher, eds. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009); Stradling, *The Nature of New York*; Peter Bacon Hales, "American Views and the Romance of Modernization." In *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, Martha Sandweiss, ed. (Fort Worth: Amon Center Museum, 1991), 205, 209, 252, 242, 246; Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 72-76; Susan Danly Walther, "The Landscape Photographs of Alexander Gardner and Andrew Joseph Russell," especially chapter 4, "Andrew Joseph Russell's 'The Great West Illustrated'" 58-92; Susan Danly, "Introduction," in *The Railroad in American Art: Representations of Technological Change*, 17; Shaffer, *See America First*, 3-6; Novak, *Nature and Culture*, xii-xiii. Perhaps one of the most famous equations of travel and aesthetic vision with commodification and national identity is Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*. See also Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and for a similar take from an environmental historian, see Robert Campbell's at times brilliant *In Darkest Alaska: Travel and Empire Along the Inside Passage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

⁹⁶ Photographer and essayist Robert Adams has a wonderful, nuanced, sensitive critique of Adams—one that calls attention to the beauty and artistry of Adams’s work even as it refuses to let Adams off the hook. “Like many of his generation,” Robert Adams writes, “he seems never really to have faced what his country’s economic system meant for the land.” Land preservation was the goal towards which Ansel Adams worked, and as should by now be evident, there is nothing inherently critical of industrial capitalism in the effort to set a few bits of land aside. Deborah Bright sees landscape as a bastion of American myths about nature, culture, beauty, and masculinity. There’s something inherently conservative about this, Bright points out, and though her conclusions are overdrawn, resting on a simplified reading of American history, she’s put her finger on an important critique of mainstream American environmental aesthetics. Likewise, Barbara Novak argues that in nineteenth-century American art, the sublime was grafted onto nationalism, “under which the aggressive conquest of the country could be accomplished.” This is part of the sublime tradition that Ansel Adams comes out of, the celebration of American Nature. But what’s most important to point out is that Robert Adams, Bright, and Novak all acknowledge that aesthetics are not static categories: they change, they are contested, not self-evident. Even Angela Miller, when discussing the feminization of the sublime into a domesticated luminism, acknowledges that aesthetics, and their political valences change (though, she argues, luminism died, as, apparently, all aesthetic formulations of justice do in the desert of the nineteenth century). See Robert Adams, *Why People Photograph: Selected Essays and Reviews* (New York: Aperture, 1994) 114; Deborah Bright, “Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men: An Inquiry into the Cultural Meanings of Landscape Photography,” In *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* Richard Bolton, ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989) 125, 129, 140; Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 34-38; Miller, *The Empire of the Eye*, 287-288.

⁹⁷ Williams, *The Country and the City*, 124. Much as I love Raymond Williams and draw courage from his work, this is one of his off-the-cuff comments which I find deeply problematic, and just plain empirically incorrect. One of the main foci of landscape image making involved farm fields, sheep-pastures, working coastlines. It’s true that the sublime rarely shows work, but the picturesque, and to a lesser extent the beautiful, almost depend upon it. The literature rebutting Williams is huge, and tends to be grouped under the heading of cultural landscape studies. I have cited many of the most important thinkers in this vein—John Stilgoe, J.B. Jackson, D.W. Meinig, Matthew Potteiger and Jamie Purinton, David Nye, Leo Marx, and many others—elsewhere in the dissertation.

⁹⁸ Barbara Novak argues convincingly that, “The loss of pleasure is not a sidebar to the often grim interrogations of artworks’ hidden agendas. What does it mean when such words as ‘pleasure’ and its synonyms are denied entry into the discourse, indeed proscribed?...The denial of pleasure, however, is itself suppression of an intrinsic component of [art’s] perception.” We can analyze, constantly break things down into their smallest components, or break them free from any contextual mooring and declare that artistic meaning is only ever individual, but in both cases we lose sight of that which is before our eyes. Novak, *Nature and Culture*, viii-x.

⁹⁹ Writing of the pastoral, Lawrence Buell notes that aesthetics cannot “be pinned to a single ideological position.” Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 44.

¹⁰⁰ Van Noy, *Surveying the Interior*, 6-7, 33, 35.

¹⁰¹ A.J. Russell, “Letter from Mormondom,” *Nunda News*.

¹⁰² David Nye points out that Burke was not the only theorist of the sublime: Kant, too, bent his intellect to describing the sublime, but unlike Burke, he rooted the sublime solidly in the human consciousness. The sublime was not out there, but in our heads. Nye points out that though the natural world is still needed to trigger feeling of the sublime, Kant’s figuration is a blunting of the sublime’s potential radicalism, an unwillingness to accord agency and value to the natural world. See David Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994), especially chapter 1, “The Sublime,” 1-16.

¹⁰³ Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, 45-48.

¹⁰⁴ Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, 362-363.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Cole, “Essay on American Scenery,” in *Thomas Cole: The Collected Essays and Prose Sketches*, Marshall Tymn, ed. (St. Paul: The John Colet Press, 1980) 5, 6.

¹⁰⁶ The following discussion of irony and landscape relies heavily on one of the best essays I’ve read on landscape, Smith’s “The Lie that Blinds,” 78-94.

¹⁰⁷ One of the most sensitive and nuanced treatments of nineteenth-century landscape photography is Robert Adams’s “In the Nineteenth-Century West.” He begins: “the first useful thing of which the nineteenth-century photographs remind us is, I think, that space is not simple,” and goes on to see in nineteenth-century photography a narrative of tragedy at work. No longer is western space in the U.S. characterized by silence, resistance to speed, revelation by light—in the most remote places to which I have ever been I’ve nonetheless heard the distant roar of

an airplane's jet engines. This is a loss. Perhaps the greatest triumph of the nineteenth-century photographers, and our greatest culture loss, was their insistence that space, "the vacant center," as Adams put it, was an integral part of the coherence of the scene. If nature abhors a vacuum, the culture of capitalism cannot tolerate an untapped resource. Adams, *Why People Photograph*, 134, 138, 147.

¹⁰⁸ From Russell, *The Great West Illustrated*.

¹⁰⁹ As Lewis Perry points out, ease of travel was an indication of progress for many Americans, though not unproblematically so, and travel—the experience of it, the desire to undertake it, its culture—is a key to nineteenth-century American history. Perry, *Boats Against the Current*, x, 8-9, 178.

¹¹⁰ From Russell, *The Great West Illustrated*.

¹¹¹ *Geo. W. Williams & Co.'s Carolina Fertilizer*;

¹¹² It's worth pointing out that the two historians who are the most critically invested in Russell's work, Martha Sandweiss and Susan Danly, focus their analysis not on the images themselves but on a preexisting hegemonic ideology. For Sandweiss, captions and surrounding text take primacy of place: "This is not to say that [nineteenth-century photographers] O'Sullivan and Bell, Gardner and Russell, didn't each have a personal grace and style that distinguish their pictures from those of their contemporaries. But in these books, their vision is made subservient to the grander vision articulate through the careful sequencing and captioning of their pictures—a captioning that in each case is done by an unidentified hand, orchestrating the drama like an omniscient narrator." And again, "railroad photographers...relied on words and narrative sequencing to assign fixed meanings to their photographs, defining and limiting the ways viewers might read the pictures." This is a surprising argument, given that Sandweiss is coming out of a post-structuralist influenced critical context, one that tends to destabilize any notion of absolute meaning. To her great credit, Sandweiss does reflect on how and when meaning in nineteenth-century photography is created. Her emphasis on sequencing is critically important, and her desire to avoid simply imputing twenty-first-century readings onto nineteenth-century photographs is crucial. But her answer to how meaning gets made, "meaning does not really adhere to the image in a more concrete way until the photograph is published, affixed to a printed mount, labeled, captioned, and cast forth into the marketplace," and her method of reading captions and literary text for their univalent denotation gives the impression that photographs are mute, and essentially without meaning. That only verbal text can be interpreted, can give meaning.

For Danly, Russell's photography can be understood primarily as an example of a picturesque visual aesthetic, an aesthetic which she argues is inherently problematic in its easy accommodation of nature and industry. I'll have much more to say about the picturesque, and its near cousins, the sublime and beautiful, later. But for now, I do want to point out that Danly, too, bases her interpretation of Russell's work on things beyond the photo's frame. She does note at one point that there is a great deal of tension, in places, between Russell's photographs and the captions and literary text surrounding *The Great West Illustrated*. But rather than pursue this tension, this contest of meaning that Richard Bolton argues is at the heart of photography ("It seems that wherever we look in photography, we find contradictory impulses and opposing aims...certain practices preserve the status quo and others strive to overthrow it; it is possible to find in the medium contributions to both domination and the liberation of social life."), Danly allows her notion of the picturesque to dominate. Martha A. Sandweiss, "Dry Light: Photographic Books and the Arid West," in *Perpetual Mirage: Photographic Narratives of the Desert West*, May Castleberry, ed. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996) 24, 25-26; Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 166, 185, 186; Danly Walther, "The Landscape Photographs of Alexander Gardner and Andrew Joseph Russell," 79-80; Danly, "Introduction," in *The Railroad in American Art*, 31; Danly, "Photography, Railroads, and Natural Resources in the Arid West: photographs by Alexander Gardner and A.J. Russell," *Perpetual Mirage: Photographic Narratives of the Desert West*, May Castleberry, ed. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996) 51, 55; Richard Bolton, "Introduction," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, Richard Bolton, ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989) xii.

¹¹³ Giddens calls modernity a juggernaut, a runaway engine which we can only partly control. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 139.

¹¹⁴ Thoreau, *Walden*, 396.

¹¹⁵ Henry George, "What the Railroad Will Bring Us," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 1, 4 (October, 1868) 302.

¹¹⁶ George, "What the Railroad Will Bring Us," 303.

¹¹⁷ From *Harpers Weekly* 2, 28 (1874), 192.

¹¹⁸ See Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, especially chapter 5, "'Westward the Course of Empire': Photography and the Invention of an American Future"; Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 131.

¹¹⁹ William Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 489-497.

¹²⁰ Hayden, *Sun Pictures of Rocky Mountain Scenery*, 1, 75.

¹²¹ W.L. Humason, *From the Atlantic Surf to the Golden Gate. First Trip on the Great Pacific Railroad.—Two days and Nights among the Mormons, with Scenes and Incidents* (Hartford: Wm. C. Hutchings, 1869) 54.

¹²² Hayden, *Sun Pictures*, 150.

¹²³ From Russell, *Photograph Albums of Utah, Wyoming, Nebraska, and California*. Obviously, the photo I've reproduced isn't from Hayden's *Sun Pictures of Rocky Mountain Scenery*, but it's the same photo, nonetheless.

¹²⁴ Hine and Faragher, *The American West*, 292-294.

¹²⁵ "The railroad might be anywhere," writes Gordon, "but the return came back to the individual investors regardless of location." Gordon, *Passage to Union*, 127.

¹²⁶ Russell, *Photographs Taken During Construction of the Union Pacific Railroad*.

¹²⁷ Sandweiss makes the excellent point that photographs appearing in an album should not be read in isolation. Instead, she argues that they should be read as one reads a book. If it seems ridiculous to take one page from a novel and, in isolation from any other text, treat that page as an autonomous whole, or read a poem from the bottom to the top, then the same applies to photographs: we ought to read photo albums front-to-back, the images and accompanying texts forming one coherent whole. I would add to Sandweiss this contention and twist: (contention) photographs are their own independent works of art not necessarily dependent on context the way that a page from a novel is, and so (twist) there is no inherent reason why the intention of a writer trumps the intention of the photographer whose images he uses, then reading left-to-right, front-to-back is only one possible strategy, one mode, among many, of visual literacy.

Hence my critical practice of trying to read ecologically, of primarily reading images for the way that they internally relate to each other, rather than only book-by-book, page-by-page, for there's a sort of intertextuality, or *intervisuality*, rather, that allows a photograph to extend beyond its frame—a sort of ecology of vision. This is partly what makes photographs expressive: they gesture beyond the confines of their borders, they call other images to mind. "What expression amounts to," writes W.J.T. Mitchell, "is the artful placing of certain clues in a picture that allows us to form an act of ventriloquism, an act which endows the picture with eloquence, and particularly with a non-visual and verbal eloquence." Or as John Berger put it, "appearances both distinguish and join events."

After all, one of the great pleasures of photography, one of the things that makes them ambiguous, fertile fields for interpretation is that one can open a book of photos to the middle, skip pages, read them backwards, from right to left, or randomly. Photographs don't lose coherence if read "out of order" in the same way that sequential pages of a novel do. The photographic narrative doesn't depend on one strict order, the photo on page two is not solely reliant on the one a page before. Perhaps it's best to speak of narratives in the plural, and that the narrative depends somewhat on the route one takes through a series of photos, as well as the actual images themselves. Susan Sontag writes that, "the sequence in which the photographs are to be looked at is proposed by the order of pages, but nothing holds readers to the recommended order or indicates the amount of time to be spent on each photograph." Berger argues that if we take images and appearances on their own terms, the relationships of photos in a sequence ends up destroying the very notion of sequential, this-before-that ordering, and instead, "the sequence has become a field of coexistence like the field of memory." Appearances become experiences.

W.J.T. Mitchell dedicates an entire trilogy—twenty years worth of work—of musings on images to exploring the tension between text and image, to argue that we should not automatically reduce images to a subservient position, and instead, to show that images are absolutely inseparable from the way we think of the world. Debates over the hierarchy of image and text, Mitchell argues, are "struggles between body and soul, world and mind, nature and culture," or, in other words, one of the battlegrounds of modernity. Privileging the verbal is to align oneself with the boosters of rationality, linearity, and control. With High Modernism.

All of this is to say that Mitchell and Berger are seeking to evaluate photographs not as poor narratives whose meaning, if any, is suspect, but as objects which deserve our close attention. "What pictures want in the last instance," writes Mitchell, "is simply to be asked what they want, with the understanding that the answer may well be, nothing at all." See Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 8, and especially Sandweiss, "Undecisive Moments: The Narrative Tradition in Western Photography" in *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, 99, passim; Berger and Mohr, *Another Way of Telling*, 113, 288; Sontag, *On Photography*, 5; W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) especially chapter 3, "Beyond Comparison: Picture, Text, and Method," 83-107; W.J.T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) 48; Mitchell, *Iconology*, 41, 49.

¹²⁸ From Russell, *Photographs Taken During Construction of the Union Pacific Railroad*.

¹²⁹ Berger and Mohr, *Another Way of Telling*, 79.

¹³⁰ From Russell, *Photographs Taken During Construction of the Union Pacific Railroad*.

¹³¹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 1.

¹³² From Russell, *Photographs Taken During Construction of the Union Pacific Railroad*.

¹³³ Schama, *Landscape & Memory*, "The Verdant Cross," 214-226.

¹³⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 110, 115.

¹³⁵ As I write these words in May, 2011, there is a debate raging in Washington D.C. and amongst the news media as to whether or not photos of Osama bin Laden's bullet-riddled corpse ought to be shown. Much of the debate hinges not on whether or not he was actually killed—though there are the Wag the Dog conspiracy theorists who claim the whole affair was staged by the Obama administration—or even over decency, but over what the image means: is it a vision of justice (many in the U.S. would say yes)? A vision of martyrdom (many critics of the U.S. would agree, and even many U.S. politicians are afraid this might be true. After all, in what I have to believe is a breathtaking historical ignorance—the other option is too cynical to contemplate—the code-name given bin Laden by the SEAL team sent to kill him was "Geronimo.")? An image of violent imperialism? Murder? The violation of Pakistan's sovereignty? Part of the reason that the Obama administration ultimately refused to release the photo was that it could not control its meaning.

¹³⁶ The importance of this point, especially for historians, cannot be underscored strongly enough. "All too often," writes Martha Sandweiss in an elegantly impassioned plea for historians to take pictures seriously as primary sources, "historians regard 'picture research' as secondary to their real purpose, and visual images as inherently inferior to literary ones. They turn to images when they want to illustrate a point they have already made with other evidence, instead of turning to pictures as potential sources of historical evidence, different in content or quality from what can be obtained elsewhere. The meaning of photographs, or pictures in general, is rarely self-evident, and the cavalier use of historical images as illustrations is historical texts...frequently undercuts the careful logic and attention to rules of evidence with which the literary argument has been built."

John Berger and Jean Mohr offer a complicated and quite useful twist on Sandweiss when they write that "every photograph presents us with two messages: a message concerning the event photographed and another concerning a shock of discontinuity." There's a way, they continue, that photographs, especially pre-digital ones, are objective in that they can only show what was actually there. "Photographs do not translate from experience. They quote from them," write Berger and Mohr. That's not to say that the photographer can't tilt his camera to cut certain things out of the scene, or that the film can't under or over-expose something out of the final product, or even that things can't be added or taken from the photograph via dark-room trickery. But in every instance the camera testifies that this thing happened—even if the photo was faked, the photograph itself is evidence of the fakery.

Yet, what makes photographs soulful is not their indexical recording of facts: it is the ambiguity of these facts, the gap between fact and meaning. Ambiguity in photography is not an obstacle for Berger and Mohr, but the whole point of the art. Ambiguity, with its multiple meanings, its ability to connect with various interpretations, to resonate beyond the factual to the suggestive and provocative: ambiguity astonishes. And in a funny way, ambiguity may be more objective, a better way to get at what things were like, than more clear-cut, more concrete empirical methods. "Photographs [when placed in a sequence] are restored to a living context...a context of experience. And there, their ambiguity at last becomes true. It allows what they show to be appropriated by reflection. The world they reveal, frozen, becomes tractable. The information they contain becomes permeated by feeling. Appearances become the language of a lived life." We make meaning out of photos in the same way that we make meaning out of the world around us, in the practice of our everyday lives.

Because their grammar, the grammar of appearances, the grammar whose study we can call iconography, is fluid, photographs can relate to each other in all sorts of spatial arrangements. We tend to dismiss appearance as merely superficial, but appearance is really all a photograph offers. In the factual sense, we can use photos as documentary evidence: these people were here, they wore these clothes, etc. But we need not only read photos literally. Again, Berger and Mohr: "Revelations do not usually come easily. Appearances are so complex that only the search which is inherent in the act of looking can draw a reading out of their underlying coherence...It is the search, with its choices, which differentiates. And the seen, the revealed, is the child of both appearances and the search...Appearances themselves are oracular." And so we can pay critical attention to appearance, we can see how certain forms, shapes, colors, or objects refer to each other, from one photograph to another, regardless of where it appears in a literary text. See Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 7, passim. Berger and Mohr, *Another Way of Telling*, 86, 89, 96-97, 113, 118, 288-289; Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, xvi.

¹³⁷ There are at least a small handful of Russell's photographs that capture these wasteful efforts, though they are never the primary focus of his camera's lens. For an example, see Combs, *Westward to Promontory*, 67. For the railroads' political influence, see Hine and Faragher, *The American West*, 218-282; Thomas Weston Fels, *Destruction and Destiny: The Photographs of A.J. Russell; Directing American Energy in War and Peace, 1862-1869* (Pittsfield: The Berkshire Museum, 1987), 14.

¹³⁸ From Russell *Photograph Albums of Utah, Wyoming, Nebraska, and California*.

¹³⁹ Susan Sontag notes that one of the reasons photos are so powerful is that "a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask." Sontag, *On Photography*, 154.

¹⁴⁰ Leo Marx, "Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept," *Social Research* 64, no. 3 (Fall, 1997), 978.

¹⁴¹ Russell, "The Laying off the Last Rail," *Nunda News*.

¹⁴² Russell, "The Laying off the Last Rail," *Nunda News*.

¹⁴³ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008) xiv, 60, 210.

¹⁴⁴ Gordon, *Passage to Union*, 144-148; 150152-153; Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 58; David Nye, "Visualizing Eternity: Photographic Constructions of the Grand Canyon," in *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*, Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan, eds. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003) 76.

¹⁴⁵ Richardson, *West from Appomattox*, 342.

¹⁴⁶ Sontag writes that, "Photographs are a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible, making it stand still." I think this is what Adams is doing in his photos, though I would add the caveat that "reality" is idealized in his work, as it is in every photographer's. Sontag continues, "Or they enlarge a reality that is felt to be shrunk, hollowed out, perishable, remote." Without sliding into the escapism that Sontag implies, I think we can see that this is what Russell is up to, though his photos ask us to engage this sense of claustrophobia. In a way, Russell is combatting the hegemonic retreat into therapeutic apathy that Lears sees at the heart of late-nineteenth-century antimodernism. Russell denies us comfort, questions the ability of the individual to ameliorate his or her situation. Sontag, *On Photography*, 163; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, xv, xviii, xix, 12, 54-58.

¹⁴⁷ Many practitioners of New Topographics might disavow this connection. Mark Ruwedel, one of my favorite contemporary photographers whose work has been influenced by New Topographics, in fact very strongly reminds me of Russell's in its ambiguity, mysteriousness, and sheer beauty; yet Ruwedel condemns him for the role he played in helping to create an "industrial Sahara," (he also mistakenly asserts that Russell named one of his photos *Westward the Course of Empire*. He didn't, but Alexander Gardner did). Nevertheless, I think that there are very strong resonances. These can also be found in photographer Robert Adams's work, one of the photographers most associated with New Topographics. His photo essay, *Tree Line* is simply marvelous in a very Russell-esque sort of way. There's another group of photographers in contemporary landscape photography that, in some ways, calls Russell to mind. They're called the Rephotographic Survey Project, and in a visually stunning mix of science, history, and photography, they seek to recreate nineteenth-century vantage points exactly, or as exactly as possible given 150 years of change. Their work depends for its impact on the photos of Russell, O'Sullivan, Jackson, and others, and yet, they tend to sweep aside subtle readings of those early photographers for the grand narrative of capitalistic hegemony. JoAnn Verburg of the Rephotographic Survey Project writes that, "side by side, the pairs suggest movement—the growth, development, and dissolution that occurred after the nineteenth-century photographers made their pictures." "They photographed views," she continues, "considered beautiful by the aesthetic standards of the day. In the process, most of their work tamed the West as it brought home to easterners pictures of places where few of them could have survived." Nevertheless, as I've argued, there's a great deal more to Russell's aesthetics than Verburg or Ruwedel are willing to give him credit for. It's worth pointing out that critic and photographer Deborah Bright, writing of New Topographics and the Rephotographic Survey Project, argues that "their emotional tone is either ironic, showing us a nature that has become the butt of some huge visual joke, or apocalyptic, mesmerizing us with the sublime spectacle of nature's immolation." It's a good point, but too sweeping, and too overdrawn. Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, Henry Wessell, Jr., *New Topographics* (Göttingen: Steidl Publishers, 2010); Robert Adams, *Tree Line* (Göttingen: Steidl Publishers, 2009); Mark Klett, Ellen Manchester, JoAnn Verburg, Gordon Bushaw, Rick Dingus, Paul Berger, *Second View: The Rephotographic Survey Project* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1984) 5, 9; Mark Ruwedel, *Westward the Course of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 2008); Deborah Bright, "The Machine in the Garden Revisited: American Environmentalism and Photographic Aesthetics," <http://deborahbright.net> (Accessed April 12, 2011).

¹⁴⁸ Russell, "On the Mountains with Tripod and Camera," 34.

¹⁴⁹ T. Nelson, and Sons, *Nelsons' Pictorial Guidebooks. The Union Pacific Railroad: A Trip Across the North American Continent from Omaha to Ogden* (New York: T. Nelson and Sons, n.d. [1870s?]), 38.

¹⁵⁰ Neither of the lithographs appear on numbered pages. See *T. Nelson and Sons, Nelson's Pictorial Guidebooks*, "One Thousand Mile Tree (West From Omaha)"; Barkalorv Brothers, *Album of the Union Pacific Railway* (Omaha: 1886).

¹⁵¹ Charles Weitfle. "No. 420 The 1,000-Mile Tree, Weber Canon," *Weitfle's Stereoscopic Views on Line of Union Pacific R.R.* (Central City, Colorado: Chas. Weitfle, n.d.).

¹⁵² W.H. Jackson. "1000 Mile Tree—Weber Canon," *Scenery of the Union Pacific Railroad* (Omaha: Wm. H. Jackson, 1869).

¹⁵³ Carleton Watkins, "1,000 Mile Tree, Weber Canyon" *Watkins' Union Pacific R.R.* (n.p.: San Francisco, n.d.).

¹⁵⁴ The stereoviews can be found at the New York Public Library, numbers 819, 820, and 821 of *Photographic Illustrations of the Pacific Coast: Union Pacific Railroad* (San Francisco: Bradley & Rulofson, 1868?-1875?). See also Phillip Prodger, *Muybridge and the Instantaneous Photography Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 7; On Muybridge's possible brain damage, see Arthur P. Shimamura, "Muybridge in Motion: Travels in Art, Psychology, and Neurology," *The History of Photography* 26, 4 (Winter, 2002): 341-350; and Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows*, 38-39. There isn't an extensive literature on Muybridge, and what there is almost universally focuses on his motion studies. The relevant literature, besides Prodger's *Muybridge and the Instantaneous Photography Movement*, Solnit's impressive *River of Shadows*, and Shimamura's fascinating "Muybridge in Motion," includes: Kevin MacDonnell, *Eadweard Muybridge: The Man who Invented the Moving Picture* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972); Anita Ventura Mozley, ed., *Eadweard Muybridge: The Stanford Years, 1872-1882* (Palo Alto: Department of Art, Stanford University, 1972); Gordon Hendricks, *Eadweard Muybridge: The Father of the Motion Picture* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1975); Robert Bartlett Haas, *Muybridge: Man in Motion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Edward J. Nygren and Frances Fralin, *Eadweard Muybridge: Extraordinary Motion* (Washington, D.C.: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986); Eadweard Muybridge and Mark Klett, *One City/Two Visions: San Francisco Panoramas, 1878 and 1990* (San Francisco: Bedford Arts, Publishers, 1990); David Harris, ed., *Eadweard Muybridge and the Photographic Panorama of San Francisco, 1850-1880* (Montréal: Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1993); Paul Hill, *Eadweard Muybridge* (New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 2001); Stephen Herbert, ed., *Eadweard Muybridge: The Kingston Museum Bequest* (Hastings: The Projection Box, 2004); Brian Clegg, *The Man Who Stopped Time: The Illuminating Story of Eadweard Muybridge--Pioneer Photographer, Father of the Motion Picture, Murderer* (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press, 2007); and the collection of essays and photographs that is the best comprehensive interpretation of Muybridge, Philip Brookman, ed., *Helios: Eadweard Muybridge in a Time of Change* (Göttingen: Steidl/Corcoran Gallery of Art, 2010).

¹⁵⁵ Muybridge's description of the skyshade, submitted under the name Helios, appears in the same issue of *The Philadelphia Photographer* that a description of a presentation Russell made of 12 "very fine 10x13 prints of views on the Union Pacific Railroad, principally in Utah." See *The Philadelphia Photographer* 6, 61 (January, 1869) 89, 142-144; Haas, *Muybridge*, 10.

¹⁵⁶ Mozley, *Eadweard Muybridge*, 45. Muybridge's California photographs, seen in their original size, and printed in albumen, are simply breathtaking. I spent an entire day at the Hunting Library just staring at a dozen of them. They are so big that they draw you into the frame, sort of like a less-flashy IMAX film. His photos are testaments to a person who clearly loved the world he lived in, loved its drama, its violence, its stillness. They are luminous, vivid, and one can understand, looking at them, why many nineteenth-century commentators referred to photographs as sun pictures. See Eadweard Muybridge, *Yosemite Photographs 1872* (Chicago: Chicago Albumen Works, Inc., 1977).

¹⁵⁷ Indeed, what Muybridge is most remembered for is these motion studies, and you can see, even by glancing at the historiography's subtitles, that most scholarly works are always looking ahead to the moment when he photographs Occident, and so slight his landscape work. The great exceptions, the works that pay a good deal of attention to Muybridge's landscapes, are Solnit's *River of Shadows*, and Brookman's *Helios*.

¹⁵⁸ I'm relying on the Bradley & Rulofson 1873 catalog of Muybridge's views for the sequential ordering of these stereoviews. See Bradley & Rulofson, *Catalogue of Photographic Views Illustrating The Yosemite, Mammoth Trees, Geyser Springs, and other Remarkable and Interesting Scenery of the Far West, by Muybridge* (San Francisco: Bradley & Rulofson, 1873) 16-18.

¹⁵⁹ Muybridge, *Thousand Mile Tree, 1000 Miles West of Omaha, Looking West*, Robert N. Dennis Collection of Stereoscopic Views, New York Public Library.

¹⁶⁰ Because of the internal organization of each photo, and the sequential coherence of this triptych, it seems to me that Sandweiss's method of reading photos one-after-the-other for their narrative is the best method in this situation.

¹⁶¹ Muybridge, *Thousand Mile Tree, 1000 Miles West of Omaha, Looking East*, Robert N. Dennis Collection of Stereoscopic Views, New York Public Library.

¹⁶² From Gustave Doré, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew: A Series of Twelve Designs* (Philadelphia: George Gebbie, 1873).

¹⁶³ Art historian Deniz Turker first suggested that I ought to explore this connection at the 2009 Social Science Research Council sponsored workshop, Empires of Vision, and I thank her—and Martin Jay, Sumathi Ramaswami, and all of the other participants—heartily.

¹⁶⁴ George K. Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965) 11-37, 57; Hyam Maccoby, "The Wandering Jew as Sacred Executioner," in *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend*, Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 237.

¹⁶⁵ Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, 10.

¹⁶⁶ Rudolph Glanz, "The Wandering Jew in America," in *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend*, Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 106.

¹⁶⁷ "Editorial Summary," *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City) 17, 33, September 23, 1868.

¹⁶⁸ Doré, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, 5, 9.

¹⁶⁹ The story of this Wandering Jew goes like this: "When the country at the head of the Seneca lake was a wilderness," there was Jew who, somehow, happened to live in the area, who travelled only at night, and who, the local Indians supposed, was going to kill their queen. One night, the Indians chased him over the sides of one of the area's numerous gorges. On the way down he grabbed a tree, which was promptly torn out from the side of the cliff by the velocity of the man's fall. The Indians never found their victim's body, and the uprooted tree wandered the lake for decades, looking for the Wandering Jew. See Phoebe Dey Jackson, *The History of the Wandering Jew: A Legend of Seneca Lake, Queen Katharene, Hector Falls, Romantic Watkins, and Geneva, Beautiful Geneva* (Ithaca: Annrus & Church, 1898) 5-8.

¹⁷⁰ Though it may seem like an archaic cultural trope now, the Wandering Jew was everywhere in American culture: in speech, literature, and theater (a quick online search of ProQuest's American Periodical Series turns up 1912 newspaper mentions of the Wandering Jew in the nineteenth century); in games (there's a card game and a dice game named for him); and in the natural world (plants and animals bear his name).

¹⁷¹ Solnit, *River of Shadows*, 24.

¹⁷² Brookman, *HELIOS*, 40.

¹⁷³ Tissandier, *A History and Handbook of Photography*.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Stevens, "Across America on a Bicycle: III.—Through Mormon Land, Over the Rocky Mountains, and on the Great Plains," *Outing: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine of Recreation* 6, no. 3, (June, 1885) 290.

¹⁷⁵ "An Outing," *Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City) September 23, 1888.

¹⁷⁶ In 1900, under the heading "Withers and Dies," a contributor to the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported that the Tree had been cut down "to avoid accidents." The loss didn't go unnoticed or unmourned, even though the thing had been dead for at least two years, and some observers realized that Progress had killed a very real part of a very real lived, and loved landscape. A 1904 correspondent for the *Deseret Evening News* wrote with acid pen that, "When it comes to iconoclasm, engineers come as near being image smashers and landmark removers as any biped that walks the earth." It turns out that in 1899 "a gentleman back in New York desired to cut down the running time between Chicago and San Francisco." And so the surveyors came to Utah, after "changing the map of Wyoming," and "stuck up little red flags, squinted through spy glasses and generally upset things," lopping off every extraneous curve, weeding out inefficiencies along the way. The writer then went on to recount a local tall tale going around that, on the first day that the track started to be rerouted, it died, "apparently preferring death to being a living lie." See, "Withers and Dies," *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City) 61, 54, September 16, 1900; "One Thousand Mile Tree of Mormon Pioneer Days," *Deseret Evening News* (Salt Lake City) March 19, 1904, Last Edition.

¹⁷⁷ H.C. Barely was a photographer who worked for the White Pass and Yukon Route railway in the last years of the nineteenth-century. When he made this image of the 1000 Mile Tree, and why he was in Utah, is, as of now, a mystery—and his image the ambiguous, personal offering of a pilgrim.

NOTES TO PART FOUR

¹ Leslie Marmon Silko, *Gardens in the Dunes* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999) 183.

² Of course, with any superlative, there are qualifications: There are taller trees, and trees that have bigger girths, or whose root system covers a larger area. But apparently in terms of sheer wood volume, General Sherman stands a head above the rest.

³ Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1230.

⁴ Albert D. Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi: From the Great River to the Great Ocean* (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1867) i.

⁵ Fitz-Hugh Ludlow, "Seven Weeks in the Great Yo-Semite," *The Atlantic Monthly* 13, no. 80 (June, 1864) 740.

⁶ S.J. Wadsworth, *Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel!* (Buffalo: Sheppard Cottier & Co., 1865).

⁷ Jaques Derrida notes that "without this *non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those *who are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*, what sense would there be to ask the question 'where?' 'where tomorrow?' 'whither' [emphasis in original]." Derrida, in his appeal for academics to embrace what he terms "hauntology," understands that even the most rational, modern sense of time is invariably, unavoidably haunted by past and present, that the specters of each intrude, against our will, whenever we think of those who have lived or will live. Whenever we debate about what our responsibility to those non-existent entities—ghosts, in other words—ought to be, we are literally being haunted. Even the boardroom, with the blinkered vision that can see no father than the next business quarter, is a room in a haunted house. Dipesh Chakrabarty elaborates on Derrida when he argues that the only reason historians can make rational sense of the past is due to "the very fact that these [past] worlds are never completely lost. We inhabit their fragments even when we classify ourselves as modern and secular...Thus what underlies our capacity to historicize is our capacity not to. What gives us a point of entry into the times of gods and spirits...is that they are never completely alien; we inhabit them to begin with." (Here I should note that Chakrabarty is arguing against an imagined, ghostly Western historical epistemology, stereotypically figured as the relentlessly rational social scientist myopically pursuing positive truths about that past. It's of course an overdrawn image, sort of a doppelganger, but one that nevertheless stalks the halls of the academy). And though Chakrabarty is explicitly writing about the West and its academics' attempt to write the histories of subaltern peoples, his critique hinges on the fact that even in the West, the past has never safely passed, that we so called moderns live in a present also occupied by the past and the future, by the premodern, or as Latour has put it, "we have never been modern," because modernity itself depends on the production of hybrids—hybrid times, hybrids of nature and culture, human and nonhuman. The relevant point that each thinker makes is not just to describe an interesting contradiction, but to uncover the imperative for activism (I'd except Latour here), to highlight our contemporary responsibility to the past and the future. Again, Derrida: "The time of the 'learning to live,' a time without tutelary present, would amount to this, to which the exordium is leading us: to learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly...and this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations." See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, Peggy Kamuf, trans. (New York: Routledge, 1994) xvii-xviii; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 111-113; Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 10-12, *passim*; and Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, especially chapter 5, "the Presence in the Past," 141-153.

⁸ It's important to clear up, right at the beginning, a widespread misconception. Though the sequoias and the redwoods are often lumped under the general name, *redwoods*, and though both have the name *sequoia* in their current scientific names, the sequoias, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, and the redwoods, *Sequoia sempervivens*, are not the same tree, but California cousins.

⁹ Peattie, *A Natural History of North American Trees*, 18.

¹⁰ Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 186-187. Surprisingly, there is very little humanistic scholarly literature concerned with the Sequoias. Though there are many coffee table books, brochures, promotional material, and scientific publications dealing with the biology and ecology of the trees, attempts to place the Sequoias in an historical and cultural context are few and far between. The most important for my work include Schama, *Landscape and Memory*; Vermaas, *Sequoia*; Walter Fry and John R. White, *Big Trees* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1938); Larry M. Dilsaver and William C. Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees: A Resources History of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* (Three Rivers, CA: Sequoia Natural History Association, Inc., 1990); and Peattie, *A Natural History of North American Trees*. Of these, Vermaas's *Sequoia* is the only book-length treatment of the cultural reception and incorporation of the trees.

¹¹ Shirley Sargent, ed. *Seeking the Elephant, 1849: James Mason Hutchings' Journal of his Overland Trek to California Including his Voyage to America, 1848 and Letters from the Mother Lode* (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1980) 22-24.

¹² J.M. Hutchings, *In the Heart of the Sierras* (Oakland: Pacific Press Publishing House, 1886) 214-215. Hutchings, as we shall see, fell entirely in love with Yosemite and the nearby Mariposa and Calaveras groves of Big Trees, and he was a tireless promoter of travel and environmental protection. In fact, it is his story of the trees' discovery that appears in nearly every history I have read of the discovery of giant sequoias, from J.D. Whitney's 1868 *The Yosemite Books*, to Lori Vermaas's 2003 *Sequoia*.

¹³ In 1833, Captain Joseph R. Walker's party stumbled upon the trees, and one of the soldiers, Zenas Leonard, even published an account in 1839. Then in 1841 John Bidwell saw the trees, followed by prospector J.M. Wooster in 1850. There were doubtless many others, but it is Dowd who usually gets the credit for the discovery, since his story was the first to gain widespread attention. Fry and White, *Big Trees*, p. 8-10; Francis P. Farquhar, "Exploration of the Sierra Nevada," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 4, 1 (March, 1925) 6.

¹⁴ Hutchings, *In the Heart of the Sierras*, 219.

¹⁵ J.M. Hutchings, *Scenes of Wonder and Curiosity in California: Illustrated with over One Hundred Engravings*. (New York: A. Roman and Company, Publishers, 1871) 42.

¹⁶ As with so much of the lore surrounding the Big Trees, this story is told in multiple places. I've stitched together this narrative from Geological Survey of California, *The Yosemite Book; A Description of the Yosemite Valley and the Adjacent Region of the Sierra Nevada, and of the Big Trees of California, Illustrated by Maps and Photographs* (New York: Julius Bien, 1868), p. 107; Thomas Starr King, *A Vacation among the Sierras*, John A. Hussey, ed. (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1962) 31; "Mammoth Tree from California," *Giants in the Earth: The California Redwoods*, Peter Johnstone, ed. (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2001) 85-86; also recounted in Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 186-187; Peattie, *A Natural History of North American Trees*, 10.

¹⁷ Vermaas, *Sequoia*, 2; Thoreau, *Journals*, 2:1205.

¹⁸ Ludlow, "Seven Weeks in the Great Yo-Semite," 740.

¹⁹ King, *A Vacation among the Sierras*, xxxi.

²⁰ King, *A Vacation among the Sierras*, 16, 17, 19.

²¹ Witold Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the 19th Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster) 223.

²² A.L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California* (Washington: Government Printing Press, 1925) 442. Trying to come by one clear name for any group of California Indians is difficult, because there is no clear set of social divisions, either among the Indians themselves or among their white chroniclers. Kroeber, for instance, divides the Miwok into Coast, Lake, and Interior, but it's clear that these are pretty much arbitrary designations, and the closer one looks, the less apparent any division becomes. Furthermore, Kroeber makes no mention of the groups, like the Ahwahneechee, that Clark mentions, and indeed, nearly any early history of California's Indians that you pick up will have different names. Kroeber strongly implies, with a great deal of condescension, that a lack of clear typology amongst themselves is one of the chief indicators of the Indians' extreme backwardness. My own practice has been to try to avoid, as much as possible, the grand typologies, and instead use the most local names that I can find.

²³ "Digger" eventually came to be a shorthand term for any inland California Indian, extending to those also living in Nevada and Utah, and for various reasons, including their supposed extreme poverty which forced them to eat roots as well as their dark brown color, they were among the most despised of Indian groups. James J. Rawls, *Indians of California: The Changing Image* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984) 32-34, 49.

²⁴ Galen Clark, *Indians of the Yosemite Valley and Vicinity: Their History, Customs and Traditions* (San Francisco: H.S. Crocker Co., 1904) 5; Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 103. One of the best deep landscape histories of Yosemite, including the Mariposa War of 1851 and the landscape it helped to spawn, is Rebecca Solnit, *Savage Dreams*, especially "Water or Forgetting the Past: Yosemite National Park," 215-385.

²⁵ Clark, *Indians of the Yosemite Valley and Vicinity*, 6-10.

²⁶ Albert L. Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 1, 13, 100-101, 211.

²⁷ Clark, *Indians of the Yosemite Valley and Vicinity*, 12.

²⁸ Lafayette Houghton Bunnell, *Discovery of the Yosemite and the Indian War of 1851, which Led to That Event* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1880) 54.

²⁹ Bunnell, *Discovery of the Yosemite*, 55-56.

³⁰ Bunnell, *Discovery of the Yosemite*, 35.

³¹ From *Daily Alta Californian* January 29, 1851, in *Exterminate Them!: Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape, and Enslavement of Native American during the California Gold Rush*, Clifford E. Trafzer and Joel R. Hyer, eds. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press), 118.

³² See, for instance, *Daily Alta California* February 4, 1853; March 4, 1853; June 6, 1853; in Trafzer and Hyer, *Exterminate Them!* 67, 75, 76.

³³ Bunnell, *Discovery of the Yosemite*, 61, 62. Tenaya Falls is named after the Ahwahneechee leader, and the Ahwahnee Hotel is itself named for the people officially declared extinct. And despite the Mariposa Battalion's best efforts, the Yosemite Indians were never rendered extinct, despite official pronouncement. As Mark David Spence has shown, Yosemite Indians continued to call Yosemite home well into the 20th century. Solnit notes that Yosemite Indians even work as rangers in the park, despite the Smithsonian's staunch insistence (as of 1980) that the Yosemite Indians were a total casualty of the violence of an earlier, less enlightened age. See Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 103, and especially chapter 8, "Yosemite Indians and the National Park Ideal, 1916-1969," 115-132; and Rebecca Solnit, 36. "The Postmodern Old West, or The Precession of Cowboys and Indians," in *Storming the Gates of Eden: Landscapes for Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 36.

³⁴ *Scenes of Wonder*, 173; Farquhar, "Exploration of the Sierra Nevada," 15.

³⁵ King, *A Vacation among the Sierras*, 26; Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi*, 431.

³⁶ Ludlow, "Seven Weeks in the Great Yo-Semite," 744.

³⁷ Shirley Sargent, *Galen Clark: Yosemite Guardian* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1964) 70.

³⁸ Elizabeth Hutchinson, "They Might Be Giants: Galen Clark, Carleton Watkins, and the Big Tree," in *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*, edited by Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009) 117.

³⁹ John Muir, *Our National Parks in The Eight Wilderness-Discovery Books* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992) 512-513; Sargent, *Galen Clark*, 114.

⁴⁰ Dilsaver and Tweed, note that humans have lived in California for at least 10,000 years, but that archaeological and ethnographic data haven't yet been able to uncover traces of human residence in the Kaweah region beyond 600 years ago. Dilsaver and Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees*, 15, 17. See also Julian H. Seward, *Indian Tribes of Sequoia National Park Region* (Berkeley: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1935) 1, 7-10, 19, passim; Kroeber, *Handbook of Indians of California*, 479-481, 606-607.

⁴¹ In 1910 Fry and White interviewed, and transcribed the interview in their *Big Trees*. See Fry and White, *Big Trees*, 10-11.

⁴² Dilsaver and Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees*, 20-24.

⁴³ Douglas Hillman Strong, *Trees—or Timber?: The Story of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* (Three Rivers: Sequoia Natural History Association, n.d.) 7.

⁴⁴ See Floyd L. Otter, *The Men of Mammoth Forest: A Hundred-year History of a Sequoia Forest and its People in Tulare County, California* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1963).

⁴⁵ Otter, *The Men of Mammoth Forest*, 14-16; Eugene L. Menefee, *History of Tulare and Kings County* (Los Angeles: 1913) 20-24.

⁴⁶ Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier*, 123.

⁴⁷ Fry and White, *Big Trees* 10-13.

⁴⁸ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 579.

⁴⁹ Ludlow had a life-long interest in psychotropic drugs, and was an aficionado of hashish. His *The Hasheesh Eater* (1857) was the *Doors of Perception* of its day, and widely read. Ludlow, "Seven Weeks in the Great Yo-Semite," 744.

⁵⁰ Hutchings, *Scenes of Wonder*, 175.

⁵¹ Bayard Taylor, *At Home and Abroad: A Sketch-Book of Life, Scenery, and Men*, second series (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1879) 176, 183.

⁵² Indeed, a great deal of the cultural work that has been done on eco-tourism runs in this vein. Marguerite Shaffer's *See America First* implies that promoters are the only historical actors with any real agency, that the way they package the natural world is the only framework by which tourists can understand their world. In a similar analytical vein, but directed more towards international tourism and consumption, Kristin L. Hoganson's *Consumer's Imperium* finds tourism and virtual tourism nothing more than a "tendency to see the world as an imperial bazaar, as a global midway that existed for the pleasure of entitled consumers." William Leach's operating assumption in *Land of Desire* is that "whoever has the power to project a vision of the good life and make it prevail has the most decisive power of all," while Mary Louise Pratt finds travel writing to be a tool whereby the privileged West

continually constructs and reconstructs its own hegemony. Even Rebecca Solnit finds that the major work of travel writing is to solidify and instruct its audience how to experience natural phenomena. Clearly, there is something to this historiographical trend, and I do not want to argue too vehemently against it: in the main, I think much of what these scholars, and the many others who follow a similar path, write is quite valuable. But I do think in their imperative to uncover the post-structural chains that bind us they over state their case, they miss the shock of the new, the moments where language, where description, where the literary power to frame and bind fails, and where something else creeps in. See Shaffer, *See America First*; Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*, 254; Leach, *Land of Desire*, xiii; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*; Solnit, *Savage Dreams*, 255, 263, *passim*. For a good, brief article that uncovers the flexibility, the possibility of constructing one's own view using both guidebooks, photography, travel, and personal experience, see Maria Antonella Pelizari, "Retracing the Outlines of Rome: Intertextuality and Imaginative Geographies in Nineteenth-Century Photographs," in *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*, Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan, eds. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003) 55-73.

⁵³ King, *A Vacation Among the Sierras*, 28-29, 33-34.

⁵⁴ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 567.

⁵⁵ Christoph Irmscher has pointed out that words also failed America's most famous nineteenth-century scientist, Louis Agassiz, when he contemplated the beauty of the jellyfish, *Cyanea arctica*: "words fails us when we try to describe this animal," writes Irmscher. "All the questions we ask of nature have to be formulated in language, as do the answers we find. But language inevitably returns us to a world shaped by our own notions and expectation, and that is, Agassiz realizes, *not* the world of the medusa." The non-human world has a natural resistance to any attempts at eco-centric description. But as Buell has argued in *The Environmental Imagination*, though a rigorously ecocentric literature might be impossible—how, exactly, does one think like a mountain or speak for a tree—this doesn't mean that we ought to necessarily throw up our hands and write ecocentrism off as quixotic quest of a few soft-headed environmental thinkers. Buell is most concerned with rescuing the pastoral from critics like Raymond Williams and Leo Marx, but his defense of a good, rigorous pastoral ethics and aesthetics is that the pastoral is usefully ecocentric to the extent that it can render what is actually there, even in the face of its own social constructedness. And one of the ways for this to happen is for writers to deeply, intimately immerse themselves in the natural world, a Thoreau did. We'll never be able to see something from a squirrel's point of view, but we may very well be able to immerse ourselves to the extent that we can be overcome by wonder—as Jane Bennett puts it—and start to reimagine ourselves as part of a wider community, a community towards which we owe a great deal of responsibility. That is, we may be able to see ourselves as part of an ecological community, and so an enlightened ecocentrism would include human interests as well as the interests of the nonhuman world. See Christoph Irmscher, "Wonderful Entanglements: Louis Agassiz, Antoine Sonrel, and the Challenge of the Medusa," in *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*, edited by Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009) 62; Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 77, 206, 219, 266, 425 n. 1; Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*.

⁵⁶ Lori Vermaas has a wonderful, detailed reading of this image, or rather, the multiple images that Watkins made of the Grizzly Giant, for he simply could not take enough pictures of the tree. Vermaas most concerns her analysis with the attempt to make the sequoias into a symbol of nationalism—issues I'll come to in a few pages. I do want to point out, though, that Vermaas's work with visual culture is exceedingly well done and, though her emphases are quite productively different than mine, I've nevertheless found much to admire and emulate in her approach. See Vermaas, *Sequoia*, 44-55. See also Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 190-197. For a wonderfully provocative reading of the Grizzly Giant, Galen Clark, Carleton Watkins's photographs of each, and the multiple ways that these photos were distributed and received, see Hutchinson, "They Might Be Giants" 110-126.

⁵⁷ Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 194. Schama's analysis of *The Big Trees* is slightly more complex than Vermaas's, in that not only does he seek to show how the sequoia's were incorporated into a rhetoric of nationalism, but also spiritual redemption—something that could subtly be used to critique the notion that equated Progress with industrial capitalism and whizzing, whirling machines.

⁵⁸ I am drawing much of the factual information for my discussion of *The Great Trees* from Lori Vermaas's chapter on Bierstadt and his painting. Vermaas is very much concerned to show how *The Great Trees* is a national painting, one that seeks to metaphorically show the sequoia as "a hopeful and celebratory portrait of the nation at one hundred years, whose enduring qualities had been tested but not vanquished as it neared the end of a trying reconstruction period." Vermaas, *Sequoia*, 95, and especially chapter 4, "The Centennial Version," 79-95.

⁵⁹ G.K. Stillman, *The Mammoth Trees of California* (Cincinnati: G.K. Stillman, n.d.).

⁶⁰ *The Opening of the Adirondacks*, 31.

⁶¹ Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, 1:45.

⁶² Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, 47, 49-53.

⁶³ Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, 206-207.

⁶⁴ Image from William Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery, and Other Woodland Views, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Illustrated by Scenes of New Forest, in Hampshire* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1808) facing p. 92.

⁶⁵ David E. Nye notes that the Grand Canyon was likewise indifferent to Western aesthetics and culture, though it eventually came to be understood according to an aesthetic of the "temporal sublime," whereby the great apparent age of an object of the natural landscape (in Nye's case, the Grand Canyon) overwhelmed its audience. Eventually the Big Trees came to be understood according to something like a temporal sublime, as well. See David E. Nye, "Visualizing Eternity: Photographic Constructions of the Grand Canyon," in *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan, eds. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003)

⁶⁶ Ludlow, "Seven Weeks in the Great Yo-Semite," 745.

⁶⁷ Stephen J. Pyne notes that it took three hundred years for the canyon to become grand, that before the late eighteenth century, there simply was no conceptual framework that could contain the canyon other than the one that saw any obstruction to settlement as a howling waste. And so for three hundred years the Grand Canyon was simply a giant, inconvenient, ditch. See Stephen J. Pyne, *How the Canyon Became Grand: A Short History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 2-22; for a discussion of the initial inadequacy of photography to capture or construct a meaning, see Nye, "Visualizing Eternity" 75, 78-84.

⁶⁸ *The Yosemite Valley, and the Mammoth Trees and Geysers of California* (New York: T. Nelson and Sons, 1870) 31.

⁶⁹ Geological Survey of California, *The Yosemite Guide-Book*, 185-186.

⁷⁰ King, *A Vacation Among the Sierras*, 32.

⁷¹ Sargent, *Seeking the Elephant*, 195.

⁷² King, *A Vacation Among the Sierras*, 35. King ended up being one of the few people to own the album of Watkins's photographs containing views of the sequoias. Hutchinson, "They Might Be Giants," 115.

⁷³ Walt Whitman, "Song of the Redwood-Tree," in *Walt Whitman: Poetry and Prose* (New York: The Library of America, 1996) 351. I should note that, though the poem is entitled "Song of the Redwood-Tree," I'm not being sneaky in including it in a chapter on sequoias; after all, they are related, and many people called, and continue to call, the sequoias redwoods. But there's more than this: as we will see, Whitman extends the territory of his Redwoods to Yosemite, and I do think that he is poetically combining the cultural and spatial attributes of both trees into his poem. The sequoias provided the height, the girth, the age, the sheer magnitude that made for such a compelling symbol of the US, while the redwoods existed, as he points out, right on the coast, a sort of natural indication that America was meant to spread from sea to shining sea.

⁷⁴ The American Antiquarian Society has one of the preeminent stereo view collections in the US, and one can spend hours flipping through images of the sequoias. They were obsessively photographed, and Lori Vermaas notes that by 1879, there were four or five thousand photographs of the Big Trees in circulation. By far the most popular scenes were The Grizzly Giant, the various trees and logs that had been tunneled through, and what was left of Dowd's discovery tree. Vermaas, *Sequoia*, 31.

⁷⁵ Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier*, 72.

⁷⁶ Kent G. Lightfoot, *Indians, Missionaries, and Merchants: The Legacy of Colonial Encounters on the California Frontiers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) especially chapter 5, "Russian Merchants in California," 114-153.

⁷⁷ Much of the following discussion on nationalism and the sequoias is influenced by Simon Schama and Lori Vermaas. Though both Schama and Vermaas offered sophisticated readings of the relationship between sequoias and nationalism (Schama does a wonderful job of uncovering the sacredness that was made to force the trees into an imperial mode; and Vermaas's entire book is dedicated to showing how our images of sequoias can be read against the grain for the concerns and insecurities that came with constructing a national consciousness) each, in the end, rests on the assumption that there was one coherent ideal of nationalism, and that it reigned hegemonic. Obviously, Schama and Vermaas have uncovered a thread that clearly runs throughout the history of the US and the Big Trees. But rather than follow the dominant narrative, I want to pick around the fringes, to see those areas of contestation that also tend to crop up wherever the sequoias are found. See Schama, *Landscape & Nature*, 187-201; Vermaas, *Sequoia*, 3-28, passim. See also Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) xvii, 19-22, though Runte is much less willing to see preservation as anything

other than “the best idea America ever had.” That nationalism and preservation have gone hand in hand in the US is, for Runte, a sign of America’s exceptionalism.

⁷⁸ “Mammoth Tree from California,” p. 87.

⁷⁹ Henry Russell, *Charter Oak! Charter Oak Ancient and Fair!* (New York: Hewitt & Jacques, n.d. [1837-1841?]).

⁸⁰ George Lehman, *The Great Elm Tree of Shackamaxon* (Pennsylvania: n.p.: n.d.).

⁸¹ *The Bragg Fruit of Palmetto Treason* (Philadelphia: Samuel C. Upham, 1861); *Secessionists Leaving the Union* (n.p.: n.d.); *The Downfall of Secession Treason!* (New York: Brown & Ryan, n.d.); and *Enough of speech; the trumpet rings! Be silent, patient, calm; God help them if the tempest swings The Pine against the Palm!* (n.p.: n.d.).

⁸² The temptation to draw a parallel to Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit,” must be avoided here: the contexts are entirely different. But that’s not to say that there isn’t a long tradition of trees used as gallows, a tradition that was initially seen as resistance to tyranny, a tradition which Holliday is brilliantly refuting. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, images of British tax collectors hung from the Liberty Tree were very popular, and signified American freedom. They were the equivalents to the “Terrorist Hunting Permits” that we saw cropping up after September 11, 2001. When Jefferson wrote, “the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants,” I think he had such images in mind. But by the 1930s when Holliday was singing and releasing her song, the narrative valences had shifted—at least for some—and bodies hanging from trees were no longer a celebration of American unity, although, as the horrific genre of lynching postcards show, there were clearly those who still felt that extra-judicial murder was a perfectly acceptable act of national and cultural unity. Jefferson to William S. Smith, in Kramnick, ed., *American Political Thought*, 361.

⁸³ “The Last and Best Portrait of Jeff Davis, Drawn from Life by A. Sour Apple Tree,” MS, n.d. [1865?], The American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. There are enough cartoons showing a Davis hung from an apple to tree that it almost feels like a subgenre of political humor.

⁸⁴ Geological Survey of California, *The Yosemite Book*, 108.

⁸⁵ The best meditation on the work that the living must do when surrounded by death, on the slippery metamorphosis of human limb into woody and vice versa, and the historical inbreeding between sylvan stumps and the ubiquitous post-Civil War human stumps is Aaron Sachs’s *Arcadian America: The Death and Life of an Environmental Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). It’s hard to pick one particular passage to cite—you should really just read the whole damn thing—but of particular relevance here is chapter four, “Stumps” p. 137-209.

⁸⁶ Whitman, “Song of the Redwood-Tree,” 351.

⁸⁷ David S. Reynolds argues that the experience of the post-war era shattered Whitman, forced him inward. Though Whitman had initially thought that his poetry could unify the nation, the disruptions caused by Reconstruction convinced him otherwise, strong-armed him into the view that the triumph of capitalism was the only bond strong enough to close the gap between North and South. I think that there is a good argument to be made that Whitman’s embrace of capitalism towards the end of his life was half-hearted, ambiguous at best. But the point I want to make is that there was a window when Whitman, and many Americans besides, saw great possibilities in a variety of things besides industrial capitalism. See Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America*, especially chapters 13 and 14, “Reconstructing A Nation, Reconstructing a Poet,” 413-494.

⁸⁸ Otis J. Williams, *Mammoth Trees of California, Illustrated by a Comparison with other Noted Trees, Ancient and Modern* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1871) 15-16.

⁸⁹ Asa Gray, *Sequoia and its History: An Address by Professor Asa Gray, President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Delivered at the Meeting Held at Dubuque, Iowa, August, 1872* (Salem: Salem Press, 1872) 4.

⁹⁰ John Muir, *The Mountains of California in The Eight Wilderness-Discovery Books* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992) 368.

⁹¹ At least for a while. Since 1939 we have known it as *Sequoiadendron giganteum*. There were a host of competing names in the late-nineteenth century, however, including *Taxodium washingtonianum*, *Sequoia wellingtonia*, and the one most favored by the US government and Galen Clark, *Sequoia washingtoniana*, which never really caught on. See U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Report on the Big Trees of California* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900) 22; Galen Clark, *The Big Trees of California: Their History and Characteristics* (Redondo Beach: Reflex Publishing Company, 1907) 103-104. Geological Survey of California, *The Yosemite Book*; Strong, *Trees...or Timber?* 6; Fry and White, *Big Trees*, 105-106; Schama, *Landscape & Memory*, 187; Peattie, *A Natural History of North American Trees*, 6.

⁹² Whitman, “Song of the Redwood-Tree,” 351-352.

⁹³ Geological Survey of California, *The Yosemite Book*, 103-104.

⁹⁴ There's a brilliant dissertation waiting to be written about Sequoyah and the politics of story telling, but this is not the right place to delve into that work. I've stitched together the standard narrative of Sequoyah from "Se-Quo-Yah: The Inventor of the Cherokee Alphabet," *Christian Watchman* 18, no. 33 (Aug. 18, 1837): 132; "Description of the Cherokee Alphabet," *American Annals of Education* 2 (April, 1832) 181-184; Rev. F.R. Goulding, *Sal-O-Quah; or, Boy-Life Among the Cherokees* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1870) 40-58; George E. Foster, *Se-Quo-Yah, the American Cadmus and Modern Moses* (1885; Reprint. New York: AMS Press, 1979); Susan Kalter, "'America's Histories' Revisited: The Case of *Tell Them They Lie*," *American Indian Quarterly*, 25, 3 (2001) 333-337; and Traveller Bird, *Tell Them They Lie: The Sequoyah Myth* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Publishers, 1971).

⁹⁵ Grant Foreman, *Sequoyah* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1938) 3. Foreman is still cited as an authority on the history of Sequoyah, which becomes quite problematic given that, as the following discussion will show, his historical evidence consists heavily of hearsay and recollection. Indeed, there are almost no Indian voices at all in his story, which tends to slight the geopolitical instability roiling the waters of the Southeast of Sequoyah's day, and rather substitutes a heroic, paper-thin Sequoyah who does not present much of a challenge to U.S. imperialism. For a recent example that relies exclusively on Foreman, and so repeats miraculous story as gospel truth, see Howe *What Hath God Wrought*, 344.

⁹⁶ Two classic histories of the Cherokee repeat the standard story with almost no primary documentation. See William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) 350-354; and John Ehle's engaging and well written *Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988) 152-153, 160-161.

⁹⁷ I do not mean to give the impression that we should take Traveller Bird's narrative as gospel truth: he has clearly crafted a history suited to his purpose. But that's not to say that we should dismiss Traveller Bird, either, and there are dozens of factors indicating that Traveller Bird's narrative should be taken very seriously, should be given at least as much, if not more, credibility as the standard tale. *Tell Them They Lie* has stirred something of a controversy amongst Native American historians, and at root is the epistemological question of how we determine the truth-value of historical sources. Arnold Krupat, expanding on William Cronon's arguments about facticity, argues that we here in the modern Western Ivory Towers must learn to use Native histories crafted according to a different epistemological scheme. Krupat's solution, at least for *Tell Them They Lie*, is to read the text not as a history of Sequoyah, but as a history of Traveller Bird's—and by extension, American Indian—twentieth-century resistance. Forget, for a moment, that Krupat's essentialization and valorization of the West as epistemologically modern and monolithic is deeply problematic (this is exactly the sort of unselfconsciously colonial move criticized by Chakrabarty, Latour, Derrida, Homi K. Bhabha, and Trouillot, among many others); perhaps the biggest problem with Krupat's reading of *Tell Them They Lie*, as Susan Kalter points out, is that it is lazy. If there is not one shred of hard evidence supporting the standard Sequoyah story, why believe it, especially when Traveller Bird's account was written with "more than six hundred documents written by George Guess himself on thick ruled ledger books, small leather-bound notebooks, scraps of paper, edges of early eighteenth and nineteenth century newspapers, white buckskin, corn shuck paper, and mulberry and cedar bark. It comes from the mass of writings by his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. It comes from the old war chiefs, and old warriors whose words were carefully preserved." Krupat faults Traveller Bird for not making this evidence available, but again, there are many histories written from sources that are likewise kept secret by the U.S. government: the CIA, FBI, and other government bureaus have their own historians whose work can only be read by those with the necessary security clearances. Do we therefore dismiss *them* as naively premodern? In a historical context of cultural extermination, Traveller Bird's refusal to share his documents with academia makes a great deal of sense. Kalter convincingly argues that epistemologically the standard Sequoyah story is on much shakier ground than Traveller Bird's history, but that we tend to believe it because of the force of tradition and repetition. There's nothing rigorous or modern about that. What Kalter asks of us is to read all histories, not just Native ones, with the realization that "they never speak for themselves. To behave as though historiography can be detached from its relation to and effects upon particular communities is to forget one's own history and its *raison d'être*." This is not so different from Greg Sarris's hope that the frontier between Native and Western history can be something other than a battleground, can see different techniques of historical narration as "interrelated and relational, as different voices capable of communicating with and informing one another." Sarris wants to see a criticism which informs the text at the same time that it is being informed by the text, an acknowledgement that writing speaks to us, that our understanding of the past, and the writing that comes from the past are not discrete things, object and observer, but messily intertwined, that all writing, all criticism, all exegesis—no matter how Western and academic—has a stake. See Traveller Bird, *Tell Them They Lie*; Kalter, "'America's Histories' Revisited"; and Arnold Krupat, "America's

Histories,” *American Literary History* 10, 1 (Spring, 1998): 124-146; Sarris, *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*, 7, 113, 120, 128, 131.

⁹⁸ L.T. Bowen, *See-Quo-Yah* (Philadelphia: F.W. Greenough, 1838).

⁹⁹ Whitman, “Song of the Redwood-Tree,” 352-353.

¹⁰⁰ Hine and Faragher, *The American West*, 174.

¹⁰¹ Hine and Faragher, *The American West*, 176.

¹⁰² I don’t use the term “concentration camp” lightly, but follow the lead of Hine and Faragher in their *The American West*, 177.

¹⁰³ J.W. Gunnison to Martha Gunnison, March 1, 1850. Gunnison Collection, 1832-1896. Box 1, HM 17065. Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

¹⁰⁴ Geological Survey of California, *The Yosemite Book*, 104.

¹⁰⁵ There are many more that could be added, but I chose ones occurring during the time when sequoias were being worked into a cultural identity and ones in the west.

¹⁰⁶ Laurence Buell notes that “nature has been doubly otherized in modern thought. The natural environment as empirical reality has been made to subserve human interests, and one of these interests has been to make it serve as a symbolic reinforcement of the subservience of disempowered groups: nonwhites, women, and children.” Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Alan Trachtenberg explores the way that the image of the Indian is used as a cultural shield with which to deflect all sorts of realities seen as unpleasant—most notably, the heterogeneous racial, cultural, and economic makeup of the US. The notion of a Vanishing Race was crucial in this, because it meant that Americans never had to look too hard at their Indian policy—“The Indian Question,” as it was often referred to—the natives were simply predestined to disappear, and any attempt to check their decline would be to blow against the wind. Brian Dippie, whose work Trachtenberg draws on, argues that the narrative of a vanishing race can explain most of US-American Indian policy, that there was only ever two possibilities, assimilation or extermination, both of which led to the eventual extinguishing of Native American peoples. Philip J. Deloria explores, not unproblematically, how Indianness is an absolutely necessary ingredient of Americanness. And Jean M. O’Brien unpacks the narrative process of “firsting and lasting,” by which a presumed First White Man is essentially deeded the land by the historyless Last Indian. The intersection between the work of Trachtenberg, Dippie, Deloria, and O’Brien and that of Shepard Krech III’s *The Ecological Indian* as well as David Nye’s *America as Second Creation* which, along with a good dose of Buell’s notion of double otherization, suggests how a Vanishing Race gets grafted onto the idea of a Nature, made by God specifically for Americans, and left unfinished, so that white Americans could complete God’s work, by transforming the raw, yet promising, wilderness into a mighty nation of capitalism. Here again, we see vanishing as the ultimate end, and two ways of getting there: Nature can be assimilated into American Progress, it can become the farms and coalfields, or it can be exterminated, overcome. Recall that when the transcontinental railroad was completed, newspapers and booster of Progress trumpeted that space and time had been annihilated. See Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880-1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), especially “Introduction: Dreaming Indian,” 3-50 and chapter 4, “Ghostlier Demarcations,” 170-210; Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1982) 12, 67, 83, passim; Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 4, 5, 25, 26, passim; O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*; Nye, *America as Second Creation*, 2, 4, 5, 11, 14, passim; Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999) 26-27, 72, passim.

¹⁰⁸ Gray, *An Address By Professor Asa Gray*, 5-6.

¹⁰⁹ Krech, *The Ecological Indian*, 16-17.

¹¹⁰ H.C. White & Co., “‘The Confederates.’ A Noble Group of Forest Giants, Mariposa Grove, Cal., U.S.A.” (Bennington: H.C. White & Co., 1903).

¹¹¹ Whitman, “Song of the Redwood-Tree,” 353-354.

¹¹² William T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, August 30, 1866, quoted in *Citizen Sherman*, 264. See more generally chapter 15 of Michael Fellman’s *Citizen Sherman: A Life of William Tecumseh Sherman* (New York: Random House, 1995), “Indian Killer,” p. 259-276. For a more chest-thumpingly glorious take on Sherman’s hand in the West, one in which he was the main hero trying to preserve the victimized US army from “the scalping knives of Congressional braves who were out to count coups by cutting taxes through military reduction,” see Robert G. Athearn’s *William Tecumseh Sherman and the Settlement of the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956) xvi, and, for California and the Modoc War, especially chapter 17, “Death Must Be Meted Out,” 297-322.

¹¹³ “The Modoc War,” *New York Times* (April 15, 1873).

¹¹⁴ I'm drawing heavily on the first part of Homi K. Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man" for this discussion, the part in which he excavates the way that mimicry is used as a tool of the powerful, a double edged tool, "constructed around an *ambivalence*"; mimicry is used to discipline, to say, "this is how you should act," while at the same time serving as a badge of one's always-inappropriate, always-outsider status: if you must mimic, you must not fit. Bhabha tends to focus his critique on the colonizers, and finds in their very rhetorical devices a radical sense of anxiety through which the ambivalencies of the colonial project can be unpacked, but also, more importantly for my project, he opens a window through which outsiders can gaze in: it's unclear if the mimes are mimicking or mocking. Though he doesn't tend to explore the resistance and negotiation from below with the same depth that he studies the attempted drive towards hegemony from above, he nonetheless constantly nods in this direction. In what follows however, it should be clear that Bhabha is not solely concerned with the powerful, and that the rest of his essay unpacks how mimicry can be read against the grain, can be read for its radical ambivalence, how it can paradoxically empower those it was meant to safely contain. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," in *The Location of Culture*, 122-127.

¹¹⁵ Colonel Frank Triplett, *Conquering the Wilderness; or, New Pictorial History of the Life and Times of the Pioneer Heroes and Heroines of America* (Chicago: National Book and Picture Co., 1883) 4, 49.

¹¹⁶ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, M.D. Herter Norton, trans. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1954) 19-20.

¹¹⁷ I think that David Foster Wallace's is the most elegant, tragic voice lifted against the triumph of an easy irony. It seems to me that his entire literary career was an attempt to connect in a world that fears the power of connection. My thoughts on irony have been particularly influenced by Foster's essay, "E. Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," an essay directed at the vacuousness of T.V. culture. His larger point—at least as I understand him—is that irony can be tyrannizing because it is so easy: it never has to mean, or stand for, anything; it's the elevation of style over substance. David Foster Wallace, "E. Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1997).

¹¹⁸ Whitman, "Song of the Redwood-Tree," 354.

¹¹⁹ Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 55.

¹²⁰ Rawls, *Indians of California*, xiv, 69, 81, 96-107, 141; Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier*, 13, 76, 125, 130, 135, 147. As Carey McWilliams and Don Mitchell note, this continues to be the *modus operandi* of California's agricultural capitalists. See Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field* and Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*.

¹²¹ Much of my thinking on violence and landscape was crystallized by Ned Blackhawk's *Violence Over the Land*. I must admit I'm extending Blackhawk's work in ways that, I hope, are keeping within the general spirit of his work, though he is focused on the American Indian history of the Great Basin in the southwestern United States. "Violence and American nationhood, in short, progressed hand in hand," he writes before going on to sketch out some of the spatial rearrangements wrought by violence, nodding briefly at ecological disruption along the way. In what I hope will become clear, Blackhawk's notion of social and economic violence endemic to the process of American expansion and nationhood dovetails in exciting ways with Henri Lefebvre's theorization of how space gets produced, how space is a dialectical a social, economic, and cultural process. See Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) 9, 22, 228, passim; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 90.

¹²² Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 16.

¹²³ "Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony," writes Derrida. This is why, as Lefebvre has pointed out, space is never just produced once, but is constantly being reproduced, it's better to think of it as a process rather than a product. Or again, when Foucault writes that he is interested in exploring how modernity has always struggled with countermodernity, he's acknowledging that there is *always* a struggle. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 62, 64. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 69, 85, 90, 190, passim; Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 48.

¹²⁴ It's particularly here that Scott's notion of a public transcript is useful, in that the public transcript that the powerful paint of themselves for widespread, public consumption (think of George W. Bush on the deck of the aircraft carrier, suited up in an air force jumpsuit, "Mission Accomplished" emblazoned on a banner behind him) is a self-portrait. But underneath this public transcript is a hidden transcript, the way that the less-powerful interpret and recirculate that image, mocking it, sometimes out in the open, but disguised so that the powerful can never be sure of the meaning. Think of field songs sung by slaves. The great power of the hidden transcript is that the

powerful cannot openly admit that such a thing exists, for doing so would call into question their natural superiority. See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

¹²⁵ Bhabha, writes, "The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from *mimicry*—a difference that is almost nothing but not quite—to *menace*—a difference that is almost total but not quite. And in that other scene of colonial power, where history turns to farce and presence to 'a part' can be seen the twin figures of narcissism and paranoia that repeat furiously, uncontrollably." See Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 127-130, 131.

¹²⁶ William T. Sherman, "Scrapbook on Wars with Western Indians, 1878-1880," MS. Kroch Library, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University.

¹²⁷ It's a similar anxiety to that which Jackson Lears, Stephanie LeMenager, and Anne Baker unpack in their work. See Lears, *No Place of Grace*; and LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies*; Baker, *Heartless Immensity*.

¹²⁸ King, *A Vacation Among the Sierras*, 35.

¹²⁹ Hutchings, *Scenes of Wonder*, 50.

¹³⁰ Henry Russell, *The Indian Hunter* (New York: Firth, Hall & Pond, N.D. [1840?]).

¹³¹ Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor: The Classic Exposé of the Plight of the Native Americans* (1881; Reprint. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2003) 262, 270.

¹³² Growing up in the Hudson Valley, I was literally surrounded by tales of the Headless Horseman, haunted houses, and tales of vengeful Indian spirits. Ghost stories, as Judith Richardson points out, aren't just innocent ways to scare your friends at a sleepover, but a cultural production, a form of history-making "in which things usually forgotten, discarded, or repressed become foregrounded." Judith Richardson, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) 3.

¹³³ This stereo view is one of 22 views of the Mariposa Grove advertised in the 1873 *Catalogue of Photographic Views*, by Bradley and Rulofson. Every single other view in this series is of a tree, and the titles always follow this format: name, height, circumference. Muybridge is clearly having a bit of postmodern, self-referential fun. See Bradley & Rulofson, *Catalogue of Photographic Views*, 10-11.

¹³⁴ Eadweard Muybridge, *The Astonished Wood-chopper, 5 feet 10 inches high, 3 feet 2 inches cir.*, (San Francisco: Bradley & Rulofson, n.d.).

¹³⁵ Whitman, "Song of the Redwood-Tree," 354-355.

¹³⁶ Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative*, 36-39; Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1976) 261-285.

¹³⁷ Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, 1-2; Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Communitarian Societies in Colonial America," in *America's Communal Utopias*, Donald E. Pitzer, ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 14.

¹³⁸ Durnbaugh, "Communitarian Societies in Colonial America," 16.

¹³⁹ Christopher Clark argues that the 1840s were the "moment" when communalism most stood a chance because industrial capitalism was still in an emergent stage, when there was still room for an alternative vision. But he doesn't totally want to commit to this standpoint, he's haunted in the Derridean sense by a possibility which is still a possibility, even though he (in my reading of his book) ultimately decides to see the communitarian moment as accommodation to a mainstream which has been teleologically envisioned. Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, 2, 9-10, 14, *passim*.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas, *Alternative America*, 58, 109, 112

¹⁴¹ Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, v.

¹⁴² Among the recent work on communes in the US which tend to see the movement as always-already doomed to failure see Carl J. Guarneri's wonderful *The Utopian Alternative*; Christopher Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*; Donald E. Pitzer's thorough *America's Communal Utopias*; and Jay O'Connell's *Co-Operative Dreams*.

¹⁴³ To be fair to Pitzer, his model has proved much more flexible than the earlier "success/failure" models; developmental communalism is a tool that can help us to see a communal impulse in widely varied places, and can help to recoup communalism as a useful tool that is available to all societies—no matter their economic or political structure. But it has a Walt Rostow-esque feel of teleology to it, in which communes tend to be merely useful in times of capitalistic economic crisis, and which fade away once the free market reassumes stability. The end state, Pitzer strongly implies, is *always* going to be capitalism, especially in the US. Communes, he writes, "are called into being, in accord with developmental theory, by the will and necessity of those who are attracted to the practical advantages of communalism for the continuation of their cause, their mission, their revelation." See Pitzer, "Preface," in *America's Communal Utopias*, xi; and Donald E. Pitzer, "Developmental Communalism: An

Alternative Approach to Communal Studies,” in *Utopian Thought and Communist Experience*, Dennis Hardy and Lorna Davidson, eds. (Queensway, UK: Middlesex Polytechnic, 1989) 72.

¹⁴⁴ *Kaweah, A Co-Operative Commonwealth: Located Above Three Rivers P.O. on the Kaweah River, Tulare Co.* (San Francisco: Book & Job Printers, 1887). 3-4.

¹⁴⁵ W. Carey Jones, “The Kaweah Experiment in Co-operation,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 6, no. 1 (Oct., 1891) 47-48.

¹⁴⁶ There is very little that has been written about the Kaweah Colony: a few master’s theses every decade or so, and the occasional mention in works on labor history or California history makes up the bulk of the published material, and the conclusion is almost unanimous: these were impractical dreamers. Jay O’Connell’s *Co-Operative Dreams* (Van Nuys: Raven River Press, 1999) is the only book-length treatment, and though it suffers from a lack of analysis and contextualization, it is a wealth of chronological events. Elaine Lewinnek’s “The Kaweah Co-Operative Commonwealth and the Contested Nature of Sequoia National Park,” *Southern California Quarterly* 89, 2 (Summer, 2007): 141-167 offers an interesting, if very brief, landscape history; Paul Kagan’s *New World Utopias: A Photographic History of the Search for Community* offers an excellent array of Kaweahan photos, while Robert V. Hine’s *California’s Utopian Colonies*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966) gives a good, brief description of Kaweah in the context of Californian utopian ideas. William Tweed’s *Kaweah Remembered: The Story of the Kaweah Colony and the Founding of Sequoia National Park* (Three Rivers, CA: Sequoia Natural History Association, 1986) is a very brief sketch with excellent photographs. Dilsaver and Tweed’s *Challenge of the Big Trees* has an excellent narrative, and Carey McWilliams’s *Factories in the Fields* does the best job of illuminating the contextual ironies in which the Kaweah Colony found itself. Strong’s *Trees—or Timber?* makes a brief, dismissive mention of the Colony, but offers some good context. Maria A. Reed’s master’s thesis, “The Strength of Vision: A Case Study of the Kaweah Cooperative Colony,” (MA thesis, The University of Chicago, 2011) is an important source for situating Kaweah within Progressivism and in establishing the trans-communal links that Kaweah maintained with a wider socialist world.

¹⁴⁷ O’Connell, *Co-Operative Commonwealth*, 59.

¹⁴⁸ J.J. Martin to the Members of Kaweah Colony. July 5th, 1887. MS. The Kaweah Cooperative Colony Papers. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 1 Folder 7.

¹⁴⁹ Burnette G. Haskell, *The Commonwealth: A Journal for Those who Labor and Who Think* 20 (November, 1889) 168.

¹⁵⁰ O’Connell, *Co-Operative Dreams*, 57. Philip Deloria notes that in the 1880s and 1890s especially, the perceived savagery and otherness of Indians was used by many Americans as a refreshing tonic to fortify oneself against the ills of over-civilization. Though one can certainly contest Deloria’s overly-rigid sociological construction of twin axes that flip at the “moment” of modernity—and indeed theorizing modernity as a moment seems awfully problematic, as well (Appadurai notes that “One of the most problematic legacies of grand Western social science...is that it steadily reinforced the sense of some single moment...that by its appearance creates a dramatic and unprecedented break between the past and present)—the point he makes is a good one, and certainly applies to Kaweah. One of the things socialists could admire about “authentic” Indians was their tribalness, their “primitive socialism.” See Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 103-106; Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 2-3.

¹⁵¹ O’Connell, *Co-Operative Dreams*, 18-23. The First International was also known as the International Workingmen’s Association, and though many have come to associate it as Marx’s project, it was a really a diverse group of anarchists, trade-unionists, Marxists, Italian Nationalists, Owenites—generally an amalgamation of any left-leaning socialists in Europe. See Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History*. Foreword by Louis Menand (New York: New York Review of Books, 1972) 257-261; Hine, *California’s Utopian Colonies*, 79.

¹⁵² “A Brief History of Kaweah,” *The Commonwealth* 2, 15 (May, 1889).

¹⁵³ C.F. Keller to Carl Keller, April 14, 1921, Transcription. Kaweah Microfilm 00343 (San Marino: Huntington Library Photographic Department, 1952).

¹⁵⁴ Laurence Gronlund, *The Co-operative Commonwealth: An Exposition in Modern Socialism* (1891; A facsimile of the third edition. La Vergne, TN: BiblioLife, 2010) 38.

¹⁵⁵ Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier*, 1, 100.

¹⁵⁶ This was part of a longer historical practice in which the Federal Government sought to encourage land holding through the passage of various acts including the Preemption Act (1841), Homestead Act (1862), Timber Culture Act (1873), Desert Land Act (1877), and Timber and Stone Act (1878), which all offered land at cheap prices to those individuals willing to “improve” it.

¹⁵⁷ For the constant struggle between the federal government and the land barons, see Everett Dick's classic *The Lure of the Land*.

¹⁵⁸ C.F. Keller to Carl Keller, April 14, 1921.

¹⁵⁹ Haskell, "Kaweah: How and Why the Colony Died," in *Giants in the Earth: The California Redwoods*, Peter Johnstone, ed. (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2001) 108.

¹⁶⁰ J.J. Martin, "The History of the Kaweah Cooperative Colony of California. A Record of a Remarkably Successful Experiment of Fifty Years Ago. Revealing Also its Illegal and Ruthless Wrecking at the Hands of the Harrison Administration of 1889-93. A Statement of Facts Hard to Believe but Nevertheless Confirmed by Incontestable Documentary Evidence." 1937. MS. The History of Kaweah and Accompanying Papers. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 1, Folder 4, 28. The title and legal standing of the organization to which the communards belonged changed a half-dozen times during its existence. Jay O'Connell does a good job of charting the changes in *Co-Operative Dreams*, and I won't get into them here, even though they were perceived to be vitally important questions for the colony.

¹⁶¹ Philip Winsor, "Memories," 1931. MS. Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, 83, 92-93, 94.

¹⁶² Tweed, *Kaweah Remembered*, 2.

¹⁶³ *Kaweah, A Co-operative Commonwealth*.

¹⁶⁴ This is perhaps one of the most enduring and critically valuable insights coming from "The Trouble with Wilderness" paradigm. Ramachandra Guha put it best (and first) when he wrote, "A truly radical ecology in the American context ought to work toward a synthesis of the appropriate technology, alternate lifestyle, and peace movements." Not a bad gloss on Kaweah. Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism," 242.

¹⁶⁵ Jones, "The Kaweah Experiment in Co-Operation," 49.

¹⁶⁶ Kaweah Colony, *A Pen Picture of the Kaweah Co-Operative Colony Co. Limited, a Joint Stock Company, Located in Kaweah Canyon, and the Giant Forest of Tulare Co. Cal* (San Francisco: n.p: 1889) 4.

¹⁶⁷ Tweed, *Kaweah Remembered*, 7.

¹⁶⁸ J.J. Martin, "The History of the Kaweah Cooperative Colony of California. A Record of a Remarkably Successful Experiment of Fifty Years Ago. Revealing Also its Illegal and Ruthless Wrecking at the Hands of the Harrison Administration of 1889-93. A Statement of Facts Hard to Believe but Nevertheless Confirmed by Incontestable Documentary Evidence," 1937. MS. The History of Kaweah and Accompanying Papers. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 1, Folder 5.

¹⁶⁹ "Among the timber trees of [Fresno] county, as in the vegetable kingdom of the earth, *Sequoia Gigantea* ranks first. As very little of this timber had reached the market prior to the completion of the Kings' River Lumber Co.'s flume, an industrial enterprise which will be found noted in connection with the town of Sanger, its merits have not been known... the amount of timber in this county is almost beyond human conception... this vast area... contains 9,600,000,000 feet of lumber." Note that Sanger was a town initially founded by the Southern Pacific Railroad. I should also note that when the figure of nearly ten billion board-feet of timber is given, it includes sugar pines, fir, red oak, cedar, and Aberdeen pine, as well. See Thos. H. Thompson, *Official Historical Atlas Map of Fresno County* (Tulare: Thos. H. Thompson, 1891) 16.

¹⁷⁰ Jones, "The Kaweah Experiment in Co-operation" 49, 52.

¹⁷¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 91, 225, 296, 303.

¹⁷² Haskell, "Kaweah: How and Why the Colony Died," 106.

¹⁷³ O'Connell, *Co-Operative Dreams*, 32, 37.

¹⁷⁴ Thompson, *Historical Atlas Map of Fresno County*, 16. Road building was backbreaking work done with pick and shovel, iron bar and dynamite charge, but by 1890, the Colonists had reached the proposed mill site, and logging had begun. To give an idea of the engineering marvel that was the Kaweahans' road, it remained the only road into the Giant Forest until 1926, and is still used today. Everyone, even the enemies of the communards, had to murmur their praises when they saw this road. Kagan, *New World Utopias*, 89.

¹⁷⁵ Kaweah Colony, *A Pen Picture*, back cover.

¹⁷⁶ Burnette G. Haskell, *The Commonwealth*, (November, 1889) 123.

¹⁷⁷ Jones, "The Kaweah Experiment in Co-operation," 72.

¹⁷⁸ J.J. Martin, "The History of the Kaweah Cooperative Colony of California. A Record of a Remarkably Successful Experiment of Fifty Years Ago. Revealing Also its Illegal and Ruthless Wrecking at the Hands of the Harrison Administration of 1889-93. A Statement of Facts Hard to Believe but Nevertheless Confirmed by Incontestable Documentary Evidence." 1937. MS. The History of Kaweah and Accompanying Papers. Yale

Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 1, Folder 10, 135; Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, 85; Lewinnek, "The Kaweah Co-Operative Commonwealth," 147.

¹⁷⁹ Gronlund, *The Co-operative Commonwealth*, 22. American anarchist Benjamin Tucker was the first to translate *What is Property?* for an American audience in 1876, and it was probably this 1876 edition that so influenced the Kaweahans.

¹⁸⁰ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and Amédée Jérôme Langlois, *What is Property?: An Inquiry Into the Principle of Right and of Government* (1876; Facsimile. Princeton, MA: Benj. R. Tucker, 1876) 11, 42-44, 52, 88-89.

¹⁸¹ Proudhon, *What is Property?*, 82.

¹⁸² Of course, Aldo Leopold is not an unproblematic environmental thinker, both in terms of his actual actions and policies as Louis Warren has pointed out in *The Hunter's Game*, and his conceptual model of an ecosystem as an energy circuit, so brilliantly unpacked by Donald Worster in *Nature's Economy*. Indeed, it has become something of a shibboleth to criticize Leopold, but we shouldn't be too rash in throwing him over, precisely because his land ethic is so flexible and robust. Like Proudhon, Leopold's conception of ethics relies on community, though Leopold would extend the notions of rights and duties to the natural world. Both critique the culture of capitalism that seeks to extend its hegemony to everything. "All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts," Leopold writes in a Kropotkin-esque vein, "the land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land." Even more compellingly, Leopold writes, "a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conquerer of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such." This starts to sound an awful lot like Proudhon's usufructuary. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac with Essays on Conservation from Round River* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966) 239, 240, 262. See also Warren, *The Hunter's Game*, especially chapters 3, " 'Raiding Devils' and Democratic Freedoms: Indians, Ranchers, and New Mexico Wildlife," 71-125 and 4, "Tourism and the Fading Forest," 106-125; and Worster, *Nature's Economy*, especially chapter 13, "The Value of a Varmint," 258-290.

¹⁸³ Gronlund, *The Co-operative Commonwealth*, 81.

¹⁸⁴ Gronlund, *The Co-operative Commonwealth*, 39.

¹⁸⁵ Donald Worster notes that in tying his land ethic too firmly to the science of ecology which was "preparing to turn abstract, mathematical, and reductive," as well as mechanical. Ultimately, ecology, in seeking to scientifically, abstractly distance itself from the messy realities of the real world ended up accommodating itself quite nicely to a capitalistic ethos. See Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 289-290.

¹⁸⁶ Fry and White, *Big Trees*, 23.

¹⁸⁷ Dilsaver and Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees*, 62-64; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 105-107.

¹⁸⁸ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 590-591.

¹⁸⁹ Winsor, "Memories," 103.

¹⁹⁰ O'Connell, *Co-operative Dreams*, 32-33.

¹⁹¹ For a good description of all the legal wrangling, and there was a good bit of it, see O'Connell, *Co-operative Dreams*, 32-37, 66-73, 125-128 and Dilsaver and Tweed, *The Challenge of the Big Trees*, 64-69, 73-83.

¹⁹² Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, 95.

¹⁹³ Proudhon, *What is Property?* 15; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992) 58; Richard J. Orsi, *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 100-101; J.J. Martin, "The History of the Kaweah Cooperative Colony of California. A Record of a Remarkably Successful Experiment of Fifty Years Ago. Revealing Also its Illegal and Ruthless Wrecking at the Hands of the Harrison Administration of 1889-93. A Statement of Facts Hard to Believe but Nevertheless Confirmed by Incontestable Documentary Evidence." 1937. MS. The History of Kaweah and Accompanying Papers. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 1, Folder 7, 75-79.

¹⁹⁴ I've stitched together Zumwalt's biographical details from Orsi, *Sunset Limited*, 75, 86, 88, 100, 194.

¹⁹⁵ See Strong, *Trees...or Timber?*, 25-30; Dilsaver and Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees*, 67-68; O'Connell, *Co-Operative Dreams*, 92, 94; Orsi, *Sunset Limited*, 363.

¹⁹⁶ George W. Stewart to John R. White, June 8, 1929, reprinted in Fry and White, *Big Trees*, 28.

¹⁹⁷ Orsi, *Sunset Limited*, 363-364.

¹⁹⁸ O'Connell, *Co-Operative Dreams*, 117.

¹⁹⁹ Lewinnek, "The Kaweah Co-operative Commonwealth," 158.

²⁰⁰ O'Connell, *Co-Operative Dreams*, 126-127; Dilsaver and Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees*, 73-76.

²⁰¹ The actual details of this long and convoluted story are these: the commander of the cavalry troop, Captain Dorst, had no idea where the park began and ended. It was brand new, and no boundaries had actually been inscribed on the landscape. Given faulty information by a local land agent, and then conflicting information by the commissioner of the General Land office—first, Dorst was told that the colonists could do whatever they wanted on the Atwell Grant, and then that Dorst should stop all cutting of all sequoias in the park, no matter whose land it was on—Dorst followed his orders, and did everything but do actual physical harm to the colonists until, once again, he received new orders from the Acting Secretary of the Interior, George Chandler, that the Atwell Mill was on private land, and that the colonists should be allowed to log it. See Dilsaver and Treed, *Challenge of the Big Trees*, 76-83.

²⁰² Kagan, *New World Utopias*, 99-100; J.J. Martin, “The History of the Kaweah Cooperative Colony of California. A Record of a Remarkably Successful Experiment of Fifty Years Ago. Revealing Also its Illegal and Ruthless Wrecking at the Hands of the Harrison Administration of 1889-93. A Statement of Facts Hard to Believe but Nevertheless Confirmed by Incontestable Documentary Evidence.” 1937. MS. The History of Kaweah and Accompanying Papers. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 1, Folder 8, 84.

²⁰³ J.J. Martin, “The History of the Kaweah Cooperative Colony of California. A Record of a Remarkably Successful Experiment of Fifty Years Ago. Revealing Also its Illegal and Ruthless Wrecking at the Hands of the Harrison Administration of 1889-93. A Statement of Facts Hard to Believe but Nevertheless Confirmed by Incontestable Documentary Evidence.” 1937. MS. The History of Kaweah and Accompanying Papers. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 1, Folders 9 and 10, 124, 132, passim.

²⁰⁴ Robert V. Hine, “California’s Socialist Utopias,” in Donald E. Pitzer, ed., *America’s Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 422-423.

²⁰⁵ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 16; Allen Dodworth, *Woodman Spare That Tree! Quick Step, as Played by the Dodworth Coronet Band* (New York: Firth, Pond & Co., 1848). Henry Russell’s also set the poem to music, probably in the late 1830s. Though his was musically different from Dodworth’s, it was to be played in a musically nostalgic 4/4 time signature “With Feeling and Expression,” I think that much of the following discussion could also apply to Russell’s rendition. Henry Russell, *Woodman! Spare That Tree! A Ballad* (New York: Firth & Hall, n.d.).

²⁰⁶ For a history of the army in Yosemite, see Harvey Meyerson, *Nature’s Army: When Soldiers Fought for Yosemite* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2001).

²⁰⁷ Samuel P. Hays writes, “The conservation movement did not involve a reaction against large-scale corporate business, but, in fact, shared its views in a mutual revulsion against unrestrained competition and undirected economic development. Both groups placed a premium on large-scale capital organization, technology, and industry-wide cooperation and planning to abolish the uncertainties and waste of competitive resource use.” In doing so, he points to one of the many ironies of those who prattle on about the free-market: it is never intended to be free, but working efficiently in the service of the wealthy. See Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 266.

²⁰⁸ Stewart, *Big Trees of the Giant Forest*, 84; Fry and White, *Big Trees*, 22; Muir, *Our National Parks*, 604-605.

²⁰⁹ Dilsaver and Tweed note that, “Sequoia, General Grant, and later Kings Canyon [all parks set aside to preserve the sequoias] repeatedly played critical roles in the evolution of modern national park philosophy and management. Within these parks precedents were set that still bear fruit throughout the American park system.” Dilsaver and Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees*, x.

²¹⁰ George Pope Morris, “Woodman, Spare That Tree!,” in *Poems of George Pope Morris*, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1860) 64-65.

²¹¹ Dickinson, 755, in *The Complete Poems*, 370.

²¹² Thompson, *Official Historical Atlas Map of Fresno County*, 2.

²¹³ Strong, *Trees...or Timber?*, 15; Fry and White, *Big Trees*, 17-21.

²¹⁴ Floyd L. Otter, *The Men of Mammoth Forest*, 86, 95, 96.

²¹⁵ Elaine Lewinnek, after noting that “every one of the Kaweahs was of Northern European heritage,” concludes, “They were radicals, but they were not free from the racism of their time.” It’s easy to lob rhetorical, historical bombs, especially at folks like the Kaweahans who had such lofty pronouncements on equality. But it is also unfair. Racism is an ugly charge and needs to be substantiated by something much more than the casual observation that most of the members were white. See Lewinnek, “The Kaweah Co-operative Commonwealth,” 147.

²¹⁶ For a wonderful historical unpacking of just how strange a belief in unlimited growth is, see Stoll, *The Great Delusion*.

²¹⁷ I think David Harvey's *Spaces of Hope* is one of the most powerful academic, analytical, rigorous and yet nonetheless thoroughly soul-stirring utopian examples of this that I have found, and joins Murray Bookchin—"My purpose in developing social ecology," he writes, has been to offer "a radical utopian alternative—to this day, I do not eschew the use of the word *utopian*—to the present social and environmental crisis"—in his call for the Left to reclaim utopia. Anthony Giddens, too, joins his voice to this chorus in calling for a "Utopian Realism," that is, a politics animated not only by what seems is politically feasible in the moment, but a politics that recognizes that feasibility itself is informed by seemingly "unrealistic" dreams given corporeal form through hard-work activism. Politics is nothing without the fantastic. See Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, especially chapters 8 and 9, "The Spaces of Utopia," and "Dialectical Utopianism," 133-196; Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 21; Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 154-158.

²¹⁸ Meinig, *The Shaping Of America*, 165, 174.

²¹⁹ Martin, "The History of the Kaweah Cooperative Colony of California," Box 1, Folder 10, 138; Haskell, "Kaweah: How and Why the Colony Died," 120.

²²⁰ Lewis Mumford, *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America, 1865-1895* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1931) 26.

²²¹ Dickinson, "26" in *The Complete Poems*, 18.

NOTES TO EPILOGUE

¹ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939, reprint. New York: Penguin Books, 1992) 52-53.

² Campanella, *Republic of Shade*, 3, 148.

³ Peattie, *A Natural History of North American Trees*, 248.

⁴ Campanella, *Republic of Shade*, 2.

⁵ For information on buying an elm, contact the Elm Research Institute, the sole distributors of Liberty Elms. Though the Liberty Elms seem to be the most popular, there are other strains, for sale and not patented: Riveridge Farms propagates a strain, as does the U.S. Arboretum. Campanella, *Republic of Shade*, 173-178.

⁶ Charles E. Little, one of the biographers of the U.S.'s dying forests writes, "We are almost certainly witnessing the accumulated consequences of some 150 years of headlong economic development and industrial expansion, with the most impressive of the impacts coming into play since the 1950s—the age of pollution." And Eric Rutkow writes of the American chestnut, "from the cradle to the grave, the chestnut tree affected almost every phase of life." Charles E. Little, *The Dying of the Trees: The Pandemic in America's Forests* (New York: Viking, 1995) ix-x; Rutkow, *American Canopy*, 213, 217, and more generally chapter 7, "Under Attack," 201-227.

⁷ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1897) 1: 1. On the cultural trope of martial manliness, authentic wilderness experience, and capitalism, see Lears, *No Place of Grace*, especially chapter 3, "The Destructive Element: Modern Commercial Society and the Martial Ideal," 97-139. Samuel P. Hays's *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency* is still the classic work on the mainstreaming of environmentalism in the progressive era.

⁸ See, for instance, Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter Lovins, *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1999), a nearly cultic book in some environmental circles, as well as the wildly popular offering by newly-converted neo-liberal environmentalist and *New York Times* columnist, Thomas Friedman, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—and How it Can Renew America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008). For a good investigation of pro-free-market environmentalism and technological utopianism, see Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁹ In 1991, the National Research Council found that 1 in 6 Americans lived within four miles of a Superfund site. Sandra Steingraber, *Living Downstream: A Scientist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998) 70.

¹⁰ Rebecca Solnit has pointed out that one of the byproducts of the whole nuclear industry is plutonium, which has a half-life of 24,000 years. The Department of Energy has decided that storing the stuff for 10,000 years—less than half of the half-life—is good enough. It's a number chosen for no other reason than that past 10,000 years, even the most reductive of statistical analysis becomes too flimsy to stand on. And the site the DOE has hung its hopes on, Yucca Mountain in Nevada, is characterized by active fault lines and fairly recent volcanic activity. And it's not as if the land is uninhabited, either: it's land claimed by the Western Shoshone. Solnit, *Savage Dreams*, 78-82.

¹¹ Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 106.

¹² Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968); Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature: With a New Introduction by the Author* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006); John Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2002).

¹³ J.B. Jackson intimates as much when he writes that Utopian landscapes died with Thoreau and Jefferson. “What we have lost in the last generation,” he writes, referring to the post-World War II American scene, “is this assurance”—that utopian landscapes can be defined and then created—“and with it the capacity—or the temerity—to contrive Utopias. It is of no use trying to resurrect the vanished forms, beautiful though they may have been; their philosophical justification is gone.” But he’s not content to remain a Cassandra, merely, and he finishes on a timorous note of home: “Our own American past has an invaluable lesson to teach us; a coherent, workable landscape evolves where there is a coherent definition not of man but of man’s relation to the world and to his fellow men.” Jackson, “Jefferson, Thoreau & After,” 9.

¹⁴ Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, xi.

¹⁵ Thomas, *Alternative America*, 109.

¹⁶ William Cronon identifies the three dominant clusterings of environmental history as ecological history, intellectual history (which has tended to focus largely on notions of wilderness), and political history. I would add the resource use histories—the books on fish, or lumber, or mining—to his list. See William Cronon, “Models of Prophecy and Production: Placing Nature in History,” *The Journal of American History* 76, 4 (March, 1990) 1123n3.

¹⁷ Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias* (1922, repr., LaVergne, TN: Kessinger Publishing, 2010) 307. See also Blake, *Beloved Community*.

¹⁸ For a wonderful book that explores social movements not usually connected to mainstream environmentalism, see Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1993).

¹⁹ The Arcade Fire, “Half Light II (No Celebration)” *The Suburbs*. Merge Records, 2010.

²⁰ E.B. White, *Here is New York* (New York: The Little Bookroom, 1999) 44, 56.

²¹ I’ve always thought that “Howl” is an elaboration of one of the opening section of *Walden*: “I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools.... Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in.” Allen Ginsberg, “Howl,” in *Allen Ginsberg: Poems, 1947-1997* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006) 134; Thoreau, *Walden*, 326.

²² Ginsberg, “America” in *Allen Ginsberg*, 154.

²³ Russell Libby, “Applied Geometry,” in *Balance: A Late Pastoral* (Nobleboro, ME: Blackberry Books, 2007).

²⁴ Mark Ruwedel, “North Yakima and Valley,” in *Westward the Course of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

²⁵ Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968) xii.

²⁶ For current cancer rates, see *Cancer Facts and Figures*, compiled by The American Cancer Society, and available online at <http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/content/@epidemiologysurveillance/documents/document/acspc-026238.pdf>, (accessed 5/3/2012) 4, 14.

²⁷ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, 3.

²⁸ Sontag, in fact, explicitly writes, “The widespread current view of cancer as a disease of industrial civilization is as unsound scientifically as the right-wing fantasy of a ‘world without cancer’.... Presently, it is...a cliché to say that cancer is ‘environmentally’ caused.” Sontag, instead, headed towards a biologically-determinate model of cancer, a model which has a great deal of traction in some of the medical community. But there has been far too much research to blithely dismiss the environmental cause as merely clichéd and fashionable. Siddhartha Mukherjee, in his in many ways impressive *The Emperor of All Maladies*, writes that “cancer is the quintessential product of modernity,” that cancer is a cell “whose very soul has been corrupted to divide and to keep dividing with pathological, monomaniacal purpose.” Mukherjee, a doctor, is no critic: he tiptoes around any social critique—in fact, he only briefly mentions the “social challenge” on page 447—and succeeds in avoiding direct provocation, though his language often implicitly suggests connections and critiques that he avoids making explicit. Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, 70, 72, 73, 83, 84-86; Siddhartha Mukherjee, *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer* (New York: Scribner, 2010) 242, 339.

²⁹ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring. Introduction by Vice President Al Gore* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962; Introduction, 1994) 8.

³⁰ Steingraber, *Living Downstream*, 60.

³¹ Steingraber, *Living Downstream*, 114, 131.

³² Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, flyleaf.

³³ Thoreau, Henry David. "Life Without Principle," in *Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems* (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 366.

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